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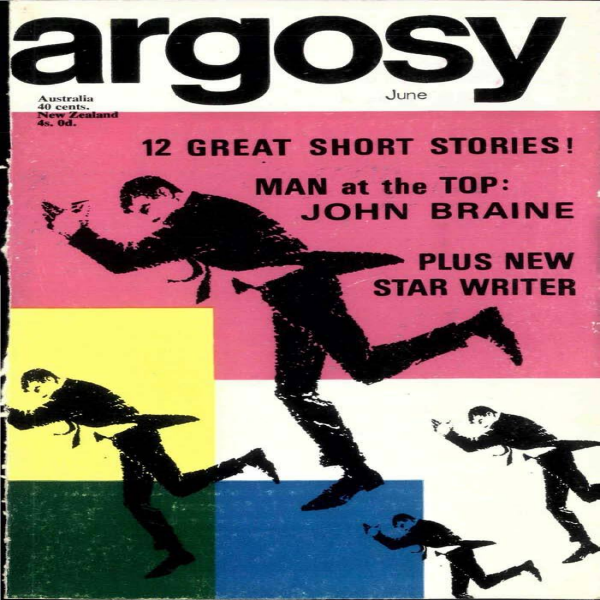

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A Fleetway magazine

A startling new talent makes his first appearance in Argosy with his first short story

The Rabbit

BY TED LEWIS

WAKING. The single sheet tightened, wrapped itself round my body more snugly. A bare shoulder caught the cool still morning drifting through the summer window. My position changed. Even more comfortable than before. Dreams began knitting themselves back together, but the voice was back.

The voice said: "It's half-past, our Victor."

I know it's half-past. I know it's half-past. I know it's half-past. Mother, go away.

I screwed up my eyes. I sensed the clarity outside the window but it didn't make any difference to me. My eyes were going to stay tight shut till the ultimate second.

"Victor, your father's nearly ready, you know."

Lies. Only a minute ago he was making chicken noises in the bathroom. I countered this with a lie of my own. I rolled to the edge of the bed and picked up a shoe and banged it on the floor. "It's all right, Mother. I'm up."

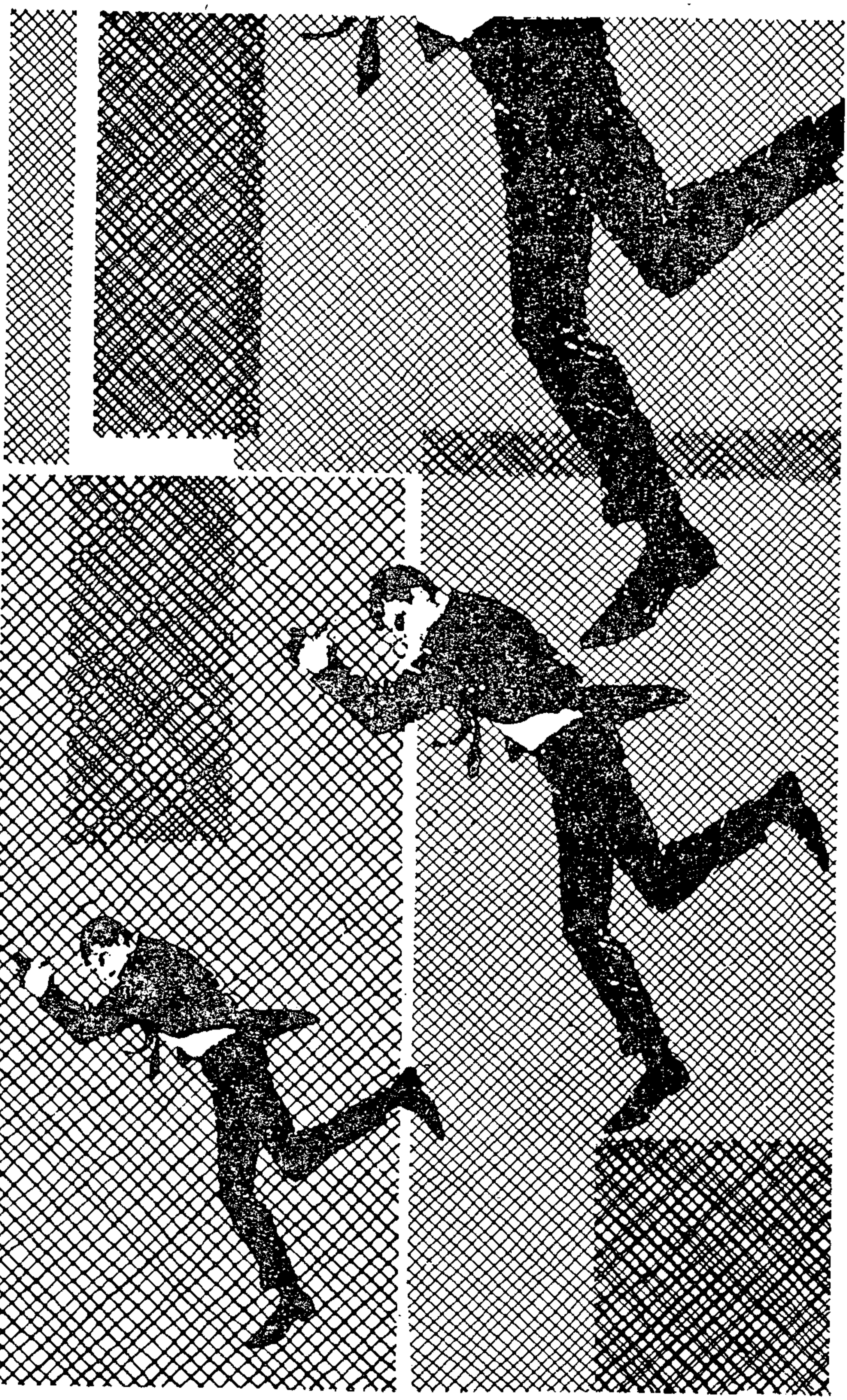
For a minute her unbelieving silence hung at the bottom of the stairs. Then heels on the tiled hall floor and the kitchen door closed.

The shoe-banging galvanised my eyes open. Above the evergreen trees, across the road away from the sun, the uniformly blue sky was poised in expectation of the day's heat. The quarry would be hot by ten o'clock. Yesterday we'd had one hundred and seven degrees on the face, at mid-day.

The kitchen door opened. Guilt levered me out of bed.

"Victor!"

I opened the bedroom door. "All right. I'm up, Mother. I'm up. I've told you."



"Well, just hurry up, then."

The door closed. I put my trousers on. My art-school folder was sticking out from under the bed. I pushed it out of sight with my foot. I didn't want reminding of my holiday work at that time of day. I went out of the bedroom, past my grandma's room, past the quiet attic stairs, along the landing, through the spare room and into the sunshine of the bathroom. I looked out of the window. Under the pear tree, a cat was dreaming softly, hiding its thoughts in tall grass. Beyond the orchard, fields stretched down to the river, its pale aspect interrupted only by the sporadic chimneys of the brick works. Two and a half miles away, on the opposite bank, came that faraway, murmuring buzzing, felt rather than heard, an amalgam of the sound of back yards and lorries, and children and chickens.

In the kitchen, my father was eating his porridge and reading. The morning paper rustled as I came through the door. I sat down at the table. He nodded, more or less in my direction. At breakfast, in our house, the law was that no-one spoke unless they had to. At that time of day, our tempers were shorter than a frog's eyelash. Porridge was given to me and my tea poured out. The cat came in through the back door.

"Now, Fred," said my mother. "How's a beautiful boy then? Who's lovely?"

"Now then, Fred," said my father. We would talk to cats in our house even in the morning.

"Here's what I've made for your dinner, Victor." She put the sandwiches next to my plate of porridge. "And here's a pint of milk."

"Did you get any lemonade?"

"Oh, Victor, I forgot. I'm sorry."

"Hell. I'll die of thirst."

"You'll manage," said my father.

We got up to go. The cat jumped up on to my seat.

Chickens clucked in Johnson's woodyard where my father kept his car. We got in. The smell of limestone dust was there when I opened the door. My father backed the car out on to the High-Street. We drove up the hill and out of town. Empty swings shone behind oak trees across the park. We reached the top of the wolds, and the road flattened out. Sun danced on the passing hedges.

"Cig?" asked my father.

"Ta," I said.

He took one himself, then handed over the packet. After we'd lit up he said, "So how does it feel today, now you've got into the swing of things?"

"All right. A bit boring, but I'm quite enjoying it."

He grinned sardonically. "When you've been going there as long as I have," he said, "you'll know whether or not it's boring." He moved the car slightly to the centre of the road to avoid the remains of a pheasant. "Is is harder than you thought?"

"It's hard. I'll get used to it. It's only for a month."

"Well, go easy. Don't knock yourself out. You're not used to it. You know what I mean. You know I'm not doing you any favours."

First we stopped off at the quarry to pick up Eric West. My father drove the car into the middle of the quarry bottom. We got out. The quarry was big and white. Cool blues hung about at the bottom of the face, leftovers from the dawn. The atmosphere was of inactivity, but that was because the twelve men who worked the quarry were strung well out by its size.

We walked down towards the lorry that was currently being loaded up. The excavator was silent. Arnold Tofts was drilling for blasting. On top of the face, at the rim, a man was levering away some loose stone with an iron bar. My father called up to him. "Herbert, I want you down here a minute."

"Right, Mr. Graves." Herbert Wheatley, the foreman, disappeared from the edge.

On top of the loaded lorry, Eric West was throwing off the flints. Occasionally he would find one still embedded in a piece of stone. Then he would take up his fourteen-pound hammer and crack the stone so hard that the bits flew like bullets.

"Clacker," said my father to him. "I want you on the wagons today. Finish that load and you can come down with me."

Clacker smiled, tight lips over brilliant teeth. His eyes watched me. They were tough as fists, but fast as stoats. Clacker was what he was called. I-knew him apart from the quarry, but only from the other side of a Singing room. He and his mates lived out of town but they used the town pubs on Saturday nights. They were rough boys, but Clacker was the provoker in any punch-up. His smile was with him right till the first punch.

Herbert Wheatley slithered to the bottom of a scree.

"Have the steel works been on yet, Herbert?" asked my father.

"No, they ain't been on yet, Mr. Graves. They don't want to, either." Herbert's neat strong body stopped by my father. He reached up an arm coloured flat ochre and pushed his cap back from his forehead. "No, we don't want any extra today," he said. "We want a few extra loads for crusher if we can."

"We still want them, extra loads or not, Herbert," said my father. "Are you ready, Clacker?"

Clacker threw two flints into the rusty barrow by the lorry's back wheel, then jumped down.

The car wound down the woody hill. Herbert was in front next to my father. Clacker was next to me. His working jacket covered his knees. The *Racing World* stuck out of one of the pockets.

Herbert Wheatley turned round. "I bet you'll be glad when it's o'er, wain't you, Victor?" he said, grinning.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm quite enjoying it really. It makes a change."

"Aye. I can see how it would. Do you know though, Victor, I've been in same job sin' I was fifteen, not in same quarry like, but in same work. 'Appen I wouldn't like nowt else. I farmed for three years, but that were afore I took up quarryin', so I suppose I were too young to tell whether that would've suited."

I caught my father's grinning eyes in the driving mirror. Clacker looked at Herbert's weather-cracked neck. We came out of the trees. A mile away, the kilns at the railway station protruded up from the plain, black against the morning sun.

The kilns smelled warm. The lift, carrying a pan of crushed stone, squealed upwards to the top of the furnace. Frank Peacock slammed back the gates and wheeled out the pan. My father looked up at him while he emptied the pan into the fire. The heat made waves in the blue sky. The lift started down again.

Clacker and I got into a wagon and began raking the stones for flints. Above us, at eye level, my father's boots, ingrained with lime dust, scraped across the dry flint-embedded platform towards Frank Peacock.

Clacker and I raked about for a few more minutes without saying anything. I stood upright for a minute to throw a flint

into the barrow. I looked at Clacker's wide back, pink in wet patches through his vest. He turned to reach for his hammer and saw me watching him.

"It's going to be hot," I said, for something to say.

"Yeah, like, it does get hot. You know, in summer." He smiled, not looking at me, looking at his hand as it plucked the hammer off the stone. He turned back. I laughed, more a snort down the nose, so he would see that I was a person who could take sarcasm; but so that he would know that I was sharp like him.

I said, "Yeah. It's funny, you know. I've wondered about that. I've noticed how it seems to get hotter round this time of year than at any other."

"You have, have you," he said, splitting a small stone with a light one-handed tap of his hammer, holding the shaft up near the head. "That's what they teach you in colleges nowadays, is it? Brainy stuff." He threw the flint out. "No, I'll tell you what it probably is; people usually get a bit warm when they do a bit of hard work."

My father came back to the edge of the platform. "What about that big one there?" he said to me.

"There's no flint in it."

"I can see that. It's too big to go through their crusher at the other end, though, isn't it?"

I cracked the stone. It took two swings.

"What about that one in the corner?" said my father. I turned back, scrambled down to it and threw it out.

"You must have eyes like a hawk," I said.

"You don't have to have eyes like a hawk to spot a flint as big as that," he said. He got into the car and drove off, back to the quarry.

Clacker said: "You'll have to do better than that, when your old man's about. But it's not as if you're making a career of it, is it?"

We were almost at the end of the next wagon when Arthur Akester's lorry turned in from the main road and approached us up the slight incline. We'd known it was coming since a mile away. There was never much traffic on that road, even at its busiest, and you got to know the sound of my father's lorries.

Arthur swung the lorry away from us, then backed it up in our direction. Its noise reached its crescendo, stayed there a minute, then cut out. The back wheels rested against the raised lip of the platform. There was clear silence for a few

seconds then Arthur started the whirring of the hydraulic tipping mechanism. The back began to rise. Arthur's door opened and he jumped down. Clacker got out of our wagon and released the tailboard bolting on Arthur's lorry. The tailboard flapped outwards and hung at ninety degrees but the load of limestone remained inert, even though the angle of the tipper rose steadily. A few small stones rolled off the top and clanged into the empty wagon. Then the whole load bulged under the tailboard and shattered down. It took two lorry-loads to fill a wagon.

Arthur stood on the edge of the platform rolling a cigarette. Clacker retrieved his hammer from the wagon I was in, threw it after the fresh load, then climbed up alongside Arthur.- Arthur took out his pencil, licked the lead, and entered the load in his log book. He put the book away and took a racing paper from his back pocket. He made a few marks on the paper. Clacker stretched into the cab and reversed the hydraulic lift.

"What are you on today, then, Clacker?" said Arthur.

Clacker walked back from the cab. "Why, are you stuck then, Arthur?"

"Oh, I've a few feelings. A few feelings."

"Feelings aren't enough, though, are they?"

"They were yesterday. In the Fourth at Lincoln."

Clacker looked over Arthur's shoulder at the lists. "Got any feelings about Lugarno then, Arthur?"

"Not many."

"That's what I'm on, today."

"What else?"

"Nowt. It's a funny field today, all round. Lugarno's the only one out with any sense to its record. I reckon it's about ready."

"Daft talk, Clacker. There's three odds-on certs all the way, today."

"Odds-on, yeah, but they wain't win. Lugarno, Arthur. I'm on Lugarno."

Arthur put his paper away. He relit his cigarette.

"Come on then, Arthur. Back in t' cab. No debating today. It's work to rule for a bit." Clacker didn't look at me.

Arthur smiled. I'd known him a long time, since my father used to bring me over as a child. "Why, are you worried then, Clacker?" he said. "I shouldn't bother." Arthur walked up to the cab and got in. "I'll bring another load and then I'll take you up to breakfast," he said to us.

He started the lorry. It began to move off. I threw a flint into the barrow and got out of the wagon I'd been in. The barrow was about full, so I wheeled it over to the flint tip. I tipped the barrow and the flints raced down the incline like a miniature landslide.

I was wheeling the barrow back to the wagons when Frank Peacock walked over to me. He was kiln foreman.

"Did driver say anything about a load for burning?" he said.

"No, I don't think so," I said.

"Next time he comes, get him to drop a load on our pile. We'll soon be short on owt to burn."

"All right, Mr. Peacock."

"Don't forget, else we'll be without."

I got my hammer and joined Clacker on the fresh load. After a few minutes I said: "You don't have to worry about me, you know. I mean because he's my father. It doesn't matter to me what anybody does. He's the boss. It's up to him to run the business."

"That's right," said Clacker. He carried on working.

All right, I thought. We'll just have to see what happens.

Another lorry rocked up the slope, driven by Gil Caldwell. I said to Clacker: "Do you think Frank'll want this load for kilns or will he want to wait for Arthur?"

Clacker turned round and leaned on his hammer. He frowned as if giving the matter thought. The lorry began to turn away in order to back up.

Clacker grinned. "Looks as if he's coming in here," he said.

I shouted to Gil to hang on, but the noise of the lorry blew my voice away. I scrambled out of the wagon. Clacker sat on the far edge, out of range of the imminent deposit, still grinning.

I tried to get to the cab before Gil started the tipper. But he was already leaning out the other window to see if anybody was opening the tailboard on the rising tipper. I ran back and unbolted one side, then, breaking the safety rules, I went hand-over-hand along the tailboard, my feet on a few inches of platform lip, to unbolt the other side. Gil was still looking out of his window as I appeared on his side.

"What the hell are you gaming at? You'll get us shot if Gaffer sees us!" he shouted.

Frank Peacock appeared at the kiln. "What about over here, then!" he shouted to Gil.

"What do you mean, what about over there?" shouted Gil, getting down from the cab.

"We were wanting that. You should have dropped it over here. What's the idea?"

I said: "Sorry, Mr. Peacock. It was my fault. I didn't think you wanted it right now."

"No, that's why I asked for it." He glared for a minute, with a kind of gloomy disgust, then disappeared back where he'd come from.

The load boomed into the wagon. Gil went to the edge of the platform, and said to Clacker, "Eh up, Clacker. You don't want to be sitting there. Gaffer'll shoot us. You want to be clear of the wagon when a load's dropped in."

"I had to climb across the back, Gil," I said, "or else the load would have been all over the place."

"Better than you being all over the place underneath it. You want to be careful." He went back to the cab, stretched in and reversed the tipper. He climbed in and drove off with the tipper still dropping down.

Clacker and I looked at each other for a minute. He was smirking, but more with his eyes than with his mouth. I laughed suddenly. So did he, but the laughter was of two separate kinds. Then he slid down from the wagon's rim and on to the stone. I jumped in too. I waited for him to say something but he didn't. I carried on working and saying nothing until Arthur's lorry reappeared to take us to breakfast.

Later on in the morning, after breakfast, there was a longer gap than usual between the loads coming. Clacker and I sat on the edge of the wagon, smoking.

It was getting hotter. I got up and walked over to a bush near the flint pile, and out of its shade I pulled the lemonade that I'd got from the village shop on the way back from breakfast.

I sat down on the edge of the platform. After I'd had a drink I asked Clacker if he'd like some. Clacker took the bottle and had a swig. He put the bottle on the platform next to me.

"They're a long time," I said.

Clacker looked towards the road. From a long way away came a muffled thud. "Blasting," said Clacker. "They'll all be in that tin hut with fags on." He got out of the wagon. He walked across to the flint pile and disappeared down its slope. I picked up the lemonade and followed in his direction,

Ted Lewis was born in Stretford, Manchester, twenty-six years ago. Later, he moved to Yorkshire and there, under the guidance of Henry Treece, he began to write. His first novel, *All the Way Home and All the Night Through*, was based on life at an art school and won critical acclaim. Today, Ted Lewis works in advertising as a visualiser, but he still manages to devote a strict three nights a week to his writing

but only to replace the bottle in its shade. After I'd done this I looked down the slope, after Clacker.

He was about ten feet into the wheatfield at the bottom of the flint tip. The wheat was waist high and growing from green to gold. Clacker was looking down at something in the area of his feet. He turned round and looked up at me. For some reason I slithered down the slope and followed him into the wheat. He bent down when I got up to him. At his feet was a rabbit with a snare round its neck. Most of the men had snares staked out either around the quarry or down at the station.

The rabbit was trembling the snare tighter round its neck. Clacker was squatting next to it, contemplating it, but taking no action. The rabbit's eyes were wide and wet. Clacker got hold of the snare and began to strangle the rabbit. The snare cut into its neck and caused blood to show in its brown fur. The rabbit wriggled violently. Its eyes bulged even more.

"Why don't you kill it, Clacker?" I said.

Clacker looked up at me, grinning. "I am doing, mate." He increased the pressure on the snare.

"I mean properly. You know how I mean."

Clacker carried on smiling. I ran out of the wheatfield to the bottom of the flint tip. I found a big flint and ran back to Clacker and the rabbit. I stood still, gripping the flint and staring at the rabbit.

"What are you going to do with that, then?" said Clacker.

"I'm going to kill the rabbit, Clacker."

Clacker let go of the snare and shuffled away a little on his haunches. "Go on then. It's all yours."

The snare remained tight. A motor-bike droned past on the road. I didn't move.

Clacker stood upright. One of my father's lorries was

getting near. "I reckon that's Arthur. Better go and unbolt his load for him, hadn't I?" he said. He stood grinning at me for a minute, then turned away and trotted out of the field. Arthur's lorry was groaning up the slope.

I bent down to try and release the snare but I couldn't find the noose. It was too far into the flesh and when I touched the rabbit it wriggled like madness. Arthur's lorry cut out.

When I reached the top of the flint tip, I saw that Arthur was sitting on the running-board of his cab, smoking. Clacker was sitting in the barrow. I walked over to them.

"Arthur," I said. "There's a rabbit in one of the snares but I don't know how to kill it. Can you come?" Arthur got up.

Clacker said, "I'll get it, Arthur. It's one of mine."

"Well why didn't you bloody well kill it when you were down there?" I said.

"I thought you were going to do that. I left you to it. I had to see to Arthur, didn't I?"

"Well, I didn't, did I?"

"I'd better do it now, then," said Clacker, assuming a reasonable, helpful tone of voice. He got up from the barrow. "College learning don't do you a lot of good, does it, when you can't put an animal out of its misery," he said. He walked back towards the flint pile.

"What's up, then?" said Arthur.

"Nothing," I said.

"Sure about that, are you?"

"It was my fault," I said. I didn't want to go into it with Arthur. One reason was he might tell my father and I didn't want my father to say anything to Clacker. I wanted to prove to Clacker that while I was there for the rest of my vacation, I was a workman, like him, that students and bosses' sons were people too.

"It was my fault. Clacker came up to unload you. I should have killed it, but I didn't know how."

Clacker came back holding the rabbit by its hind legs. He had broken its neck.

"She's a big 'un," said Arthur.

"What you have to do, you see," said Clacker, looking at me, "is to grab hold of its ears like this, and give it a bloody great chop, like this."

That evening I sat on the edge of my bed and lit a cigarette. It was half-past six. I'd just bathed the lime dust off me and

I felt crisp and clean. I'd told Veronica I'd meet her at seven. I bent forward and pulled my folder of holiday work out from under the bed. I looked through the work. Well, I thought, there's no way of telling what it's like till the tutors have had a go at it, when term begins. Anyway, it's Friday night. I went downstairs.

In the kitchen, my mother was sitting at the dining table, having a cup of coffee and a cigarette. All the tea things were cleared up and washed and this was her quiet time. I nodded to her and sat down at the table.

"Now then, Murphy," she said over her cup. Murphy was a name she and my grandmother used to call me as a child because it would make me laugh.

"What is it tonight, then? The Wheatsheaf?"

"I expect so. I said I'd see Veronica first."

"She's a nice girl, Victor. You know what I mean."

"Yeah."

"Don't do anything to upset her."

I didn't answer. You must be telepathic, I thought. How did she know I'd been considering finishing with Veronica for a few weeks now? I said: "Things don't go on for ever."

"I agree entirely," she said. "But when a thing's about due to finish, it's as well to give the end a bit of thought, too." She took a sip of coffee. I stood up.

"Anyway," I said. I walked over to the back door and looked down the garden. After a minute I said, "I'm off now, Mother. See you later. If I'm not back by Monday, send the dogs."

"I don't see it," I said to Veronica. "I really don't. Clacker's dislike of me is only because I go to Art School and I'm the boss's son. Why? Ted and Dave don't resent it. Just the opposite."

"Dave and Ted are your best friends," said Veronica. "Perhaps Clacker resents the opportunity you had and he didn't."

"He went to school."

"But did he get any encouragement?"

"I didn't, did I? The headmaster thought I was a dope."

"At home, I meant. Your parents were behind you all the way. They encouraged your talent. Look, I wanted to go to university. How could I do that? With my parents dead and Gran to look after. I wanted to go more than anything. But I'm a placid sort of person and I accept my confinement to this town. Supposing Clacker was held back through

similar circumstances? Being the kind of person he is, he'd be bound to resent you."

"You can't go through life inventing excuses for people who are deliberately unpleasant," I said.

"You can give them the benefit of the doubt."

"What about the rabbit?"

"What about the frogs you and Ted and Dave used to blow up when you were kids?"

"Yes, but when we were kids."

"Why should everyone grow up at the same rate?"

"You didn't see it. You've got to be pretty cruel to use a rabbit like that to show someone how you feel about them. He's just a mean tough yob, Veronica."

"What about Marlon Brando in that film you were raving over last night? He was a mean tough yob until the film forced you to care for him by making you know him."

"A film states facts. Describes a person."

"Well, try and find the facts about Clacker, then."

"I did try," I shouted.

"Well, try a bit harder, next time," she said angrily.

"Not after what he did to that rabbit!"

"Oh, the rabbit! What's a rabbit compared to a person?"

"Well I'm on the side of the rabbits."

Veronica got up from the carpet where she had been sitting. She walked across her room to the window and stood still, looking out of it. Her room, the front room of the council house where she and her grandmother lived. The room which Veronica had made her own, decorated and furnished, as a small compensation for her immobility.

"Do you know what I think?" said Veronica. "I think that when you first set eyes on Clacker, in a pub or wherever it was, you took an instant dislike to him and when you came into contact with him at your dad's quarry, the rabbit incident gave you a perfect unconscious excuse for your dislike."

"Veronica," I said quietly, "why are you trying to put the finger on me in this business?"

"Why?" She walked over to the mantelpiece and looked into the mirror. She stared at herself for a few moments, then looked down at me. I dropped some ash into the ash-tray on my chair arm. "I suppose because I've got a grudge against you too, Victor. I'm three years older than you. That's a lot of difference when you're our age. Especially your age. You've changed since you went to college last year."

I *didn't say anything.*

She stopped looking at me. "Haven't you?"

"Last year I was seventeen. This year I'm eighteen. That's all."

"You've been a year out of town," Veronica said. "I've not."

"So?"

"Don't you think you'd better get it over with, Vic?"

I almost said, "Get what over with?" but just in time, I didn't. I watched my cigarette burning for a while.

"I don't know," I said. "It's not that I've changed in the way I feel about you. But I've got a lot to do these next few years and I don't think it's fair to you for us to drift along."

"It's all right, Vic. I don't blame you. You must have met some interesting new people at the Art School."

I got up from the chair. I was about to speak, when Veronica said, "Don't wrap it up in Paul Newman language, Victor. It may help you, but it doesn't help me."

Clacker was two wagons away. He'd nearly got through it, as far as I could tell. All morning he had been going as fast as he could. I'd worked over the wagons he'd already done. The only other thing I could have done was to have skipped them and to have kept catching him up that way, as though I wasn't doing the job properly.

Clacker wiped his forehead and looked over at me. He didn't say anything. He climbed out of the wagon and got into the next one.

My father's car drove up the slope. It stopped opposite Clacker. The window rolled down.

"Getting a sweat on this morning, aren't you, Clacker?" said my father, then he laughed. "I could do with them *done this fast every day. You don't get double time for* Saturdays, you know." He got out of the car and watched Clacker for a minute or two, then he walked over to where I was. I'd just got out of my wagon.

"How are you doing?" he said.

"All right. I'm having a job keeping up with Clacker."

"You will do. He's a good worker." He looked at his watch. "Have you any lemonade today?"

"Yeah. Want some?"

"Yes, get us it, will you. I'm parched."

I got the lemonade from under the bush. While my father was drinking the lemonade and I was standing beside him,

Clacker looked up from his work and watched us. My father finished drinking and Clacker carried on working.

"Want some?" my father offered the bottle to me.

"You finish it. There's not much left."

My father walked along the platform to Clacker. "Finish this off, Clacker? You look as though you could do with it."

Clacker put his hammer down and rubbed his palms on the front of his trousers. "Aye, all right, Mr. Graves." He got out of the wagon and took the bottle from my father.

"It's about knocking-off time, Vic," called my father. "Finish that wagon and get ready for off."

Clacker finished the lemonade and threw the bottle high in the air so it landed with a tinkle on the flint tip, out of sight.

"Oh, it won't need much finishing off, Mr. Graves. He may as well pack up now," said Clacker and jumped into his wagon. My father grinned his warmly ironic grin in my direction. Clacker shattered a stone to bits.

The evening was no relief from the heat of the day. I walked up the stairs of The Wheatsheaf, to the Singing room. The electric organ boomed out *Sugar in the Morning*, beating the chorusing voices hands down. I stood in the doorway, buffeted by the raucous voices, the heat, and the beery air. I scanned the tables, looking for Ted and Dave.

They were sitting at a table with Veronica, in the middle of the room. Ted waved. I nodded and went to the bar to get my drink.

I manœuvred my way through the tables. The atmosphere was extremely hot. The windows were all wide open but instead of cool air coming in, the atmosphere inside was so thick it seemed to be shouldering the fresh air away.

I sat down at the table. *Sugar in the Morning* finished.

"Howdy y'all," I said.

"Sho' nuff," said Ted.

"Now then," said Dave.

Veronica nodded and smiled, in a way. I took a drink from my pint and looked out of the window.

"Saturday night, then," said Ted.

Dave whistled in an embarrassed way, but on purpose. I looked at Veronica and shrugged and grinned and looked up at the ceiling because I couldn't think of anything else to do or not do.

"Nice night for a 'coon hunt," said Dave in a Southern drawl.

"Oh, for hell's sake," said Veronica. "Let's try and be normal, please. Anyone would think we'd announced a child or something." She looked at Dave and frowned.

He crossed his eyes and stuck his tongue out.

Veronica laughed. "Oh give over," she said. "It's your round."

If she's going to play it like that, I thought, I'll go along with her. For about an hour we were our usual Saturday-night selves, alternately joking, singing, or trying to talk seriously across the din.

At about half-past nine, Clacker and his mates appeared. They were well on the way, as usual, and so were we. As usual.

They stood at the bar, ordered their drinks and looked round the room to see what the talent was like. Clacker was wearing a black gabardine suit and a dazzling-white shirt, open at the neck. His skin had that rosy evening glow that is peculiar to outdoor workers after they have washed and shaved.

When he saw that I was there, he pointed me out to his mates. I nodded at him but he didn't nod back.

"See what I mean, Veronica?" I said.

"Oh, what a shame," said Veronica. Now her voice was expressing her true mood. "Victor's little workmate won't flutter eyelashes with him. Poor Victor."

I looked at her eyes. I didn't look angry and I didn't look compassionate. I just looked at her.

"Now you're seeing the definitive Victor Graves," she said to Ted and Dave. "That understanding look, silent but so clever is what Victor thinks people think he's like."

"All right, Veronica," said Ted.

"But what it really shows is how condescending he is. That's a basic need of Victor's. To have what he considers inferiors surround him. So that he can prove what a great fellow he is with the proletariat. Prove that by being an art student, he's no better than they are. The sickening thing is that he thinks he is better, but superficially pretends he isn't. He just wants everyone to think he's a good fellow, in spite of what he thinks of them. Why do you think he associates with us? To cultivate the admiration and love we're always ready to give him. Pretend to love thy neighbour, says Victor, because that cons them into loving you, into admiring you, so that you can think you're better than anyone else. That's what you tried with Clacker, isn't it? You wanted him to ask

you what it was like at Art College so you could say, in a down-to-earth voice, 'Oh, it's nothing. It's like anywhere else once you get used to it. It's a means to earning a good living. Have a fag.' And then you would like to have seen him envying your position, admiring your no-nonsense acceptance of it and being in it for the loot. And another local yob would have thought what a good fellow Victor is. But Clacker wasn't having any, was he? He wouldn't be bought by accepting your friendship."

"You sound as though you hate me," I said.

"I *don't*, Victor. *People who like each other embrace the faults too.* That's the person. If you weren't the way you were, you'd realise that."

"I'm sorry I seem to have so much wrong with me."

"Oh, God. Dave, isn't it about time we went down to the dance?"

Dave got up and so did Veronica.

"You agree with Veronica, do you, Dave?" I said.

"I'm your mate, Victor," he said.

"To hell with you." I got up too, and threaded my way to the bar. I ordered two pints. I'd forgotten Clacker. I must have walked right past him and not seen him. I heard his voice say something to me. I turned to face him.

"Aren't you speaking then?" he said. "Too good to speak, are you?"

"Now then, Clacker," I said.

"Boozing, eh? What'll the Gaffer say to that, then?"

"'*Have a pint,' if he was here.*"

"Oh, clever stuff. You're born clever when you're Gaffer's son," he said to one of his mates.

"At least I was born knowing my father, even if he is a Gaffer." I picked up the drinks and turned away from the bar.

Clacker put his drink down. "You what?"

I repeated what I'd said.

"Are you going to put them drinks down, boy?" he said. He squared up to me.

I put the drinks down. "Come on then, Clacker. Odds-on favourite's in with a chance this time, isn't he?"

Clacker looked into my eyes, then down my body.

"Hammer him, Clacker," said one of his mates.

"Naw, it's a waste of time." He grinned. "It'd be like belting a girl."

"What's up, Clacker? Frightened of getting the sack?" I

said. Veronica and Dave appeared by my side. Ted was making his way from the table.

"Don't be a fool," Veronica said to me.

"Come on, Clacker," I said. "I would have thought you'd have enjoyed this."

The landlord came round the bar. "Right," he said. "Outside if you're going to have a go."

"Leave it, Victor," said Ted.

"Outside?" I said to Clacker.

"Fair enough." He turned to go out of the door. His mates stood to one side to let me follow. I moved forward. Dave put his hand on my arm and stood in front of me. I looked into his eyes and pushed past him. I followed Clacker down the steep stairs and out into the carpark. Clacker stopped and waited for his mates to congregate to one side of him. We faced each other. Dave and Ted and Veronica stood behind me. Dusk had gone and there were stars out. The air was still warm.

"Fair fight, Clacker," said Dave. "Between the pair of you."

Clacker took off his jacket and then gave it to one of his mates.

"Fair fight," he said.

I took off my jacket and draped it on a car bonnet.

"Come on then," said Clacker. He raised one of his fists and flexed it.

I took a slow step towards him. He didn't move except for the flexing of the fist. I was frightened to hit him because then there would be no preventing the way I was going to get hurt.

"Get on with it," said one of Clacker's mates.

I punched at Clacker's head, at the same time trying to take hold of the fist he had ready. I missed both. Clacker punched me on the side of my head, just where the cheekbone gave way to the hollow of the eye. Immediately I couldn't see anything for brightness. Then there was another punch in the same place. I fell across the car bonnet over which I'd draped my coat. Clacker slammed me under my ribs. I lay across the bonnet, face down, red with pain. Nothing else happened for a few moments. Then Clacker brought his fist down as hard as he could in the middle of my back, just below my shoulder blades.

The remains of my breath fled. There was silence.

Then Clacker spoke: "That's it then. Give us me coat."

I heard the silk lining swish as he shrugged into his jacket.

"If you want any more, all you've got to do is get up," he said, his voice a little closer. I stayed where I was.

"Come on, then," Clacker said to his mates. They all walked away.

Ted and Dave picked me up. I couldn't see out of my left eye. "Are you all right, Vic?" said Dave.

"I'm bloody smashing," I said. I grinned somehow.

"He's all right," said Ted. "Come on, let's get him home."

"Hang on a minute," I said. "Just let me sit down a minute, will you." I slid on to the running-board.

Veronica said, "Feeling better now, Victor?" I declined to answer.

"Look," I said to Ted and Dave, "I can't go home just yet, looking like this. My folks will still be up. I think I'll just walk around a bit. You go and finish your drinks."

"Naw, it's nearly closing time, anyway. We're all right," said Ted.

"You better take Veronica to the dance, hadn't you, Dave?" I said.

Dave looked at Veronica.

"If we don't go now," she said, "there'll be no point in going at all."

I walked around with Ted for a couple of hours, then I went home. The next day I told my parents I'd been done over by a couple of yobs at the dance. My parents weren't very pleased, but their initial anger was soon replaced by concern over my eye. It was still pretty gaudy on Monday morning.

On Monday morning, I got out of my father's car and walked over to the wagons. Clacker was already working. I jumped in and picked up my hammer.

The car drove off.

Clacker stopped working for a minute and looked at me. He said nothing. He only grinned in his insolent way.

"How do you do," I said sarcastically and he laughed, shortly.

I took out my cigarettes. "Fag?" I said.

"I like these," said Clacker. He took his cheaper brand out of his shirt pocket.

"Suit your bloody self," I said. I put a cigarette in my mouth. "Got a light?"

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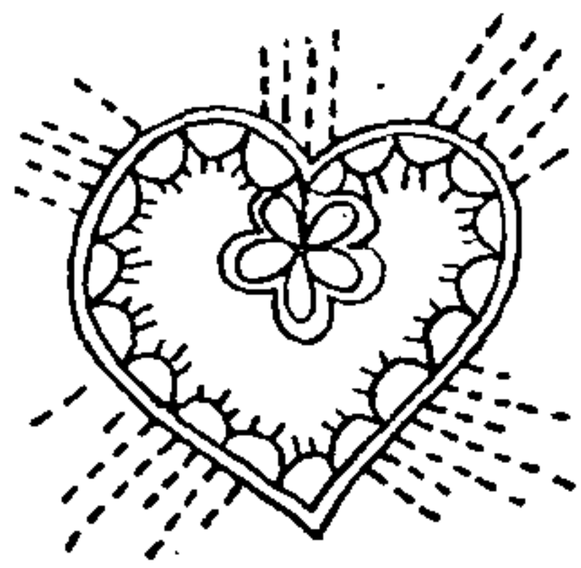
Two-Minute Tale



NEGATIVE

By ANTHONY BOUCHER

AILSA had been easily the homeliest and the least talented girl in the university, if also the most logical and level-headed.

Now, almost twenty-five years later, she was the most attractive woman Martin had ever seen and, to judge from their surroundings, by some lengths the richest.

"...so lucky running into you again after all these years," she was saying, in that indescribably aphrodisiac voice. "You know about publishers, and you can advise me on this novel. I was getting so tired of the piano..."

Martin had heard her piano recordings and knew they were superb—as the vocal recordings had been before them and the non-representational paintings before *them* and the fashion designs and that really astonishing paper on prime numbers.

He also knew that the income from all these together could hardly have furnished the Silver Room in which they dined or the Gold Room in which he later read the novel (which was, of course, superb) or the room whose colour he never noticed because he did not sleep alone (and the word *superb* is inadequate).

There was only one answer, and Martin was gratified to observe that the coffee-bringing servant cast no shadow in the morning sun.

While Ailsa still slept (superbly), Martin said, "So you're a demon."

"Naturally, sir," the unshadowed servant said, his eyes adoringly upon the sleeper. "Nellthu, at your service."

"But such service! I can imagine Ailsa-that-was working out a good spell and even wishing logically. But I thought you fellows were limited in what you could grant."

"We are, sir. Three wishes."

"But she has wealth, beauty, youth, fame, a remarkable variety of talents—all on three wishes?"

"On one, sir. Oh, I foxed her prettily on the first two." Nellthu smiled reminiscently. "'*Beauty*'—but she didn't specify, and I made her the most beautiful centenarian in the world. '*Wealth beyond the dreams of avarice*'—and of course nothing is beyond such dreams, and nothing she got. Ah, I was in top form that day, sir! But the third wish, oh dear . . ."

"Don't tell me she tried the old '*For my third wish I want three more wishes*! I thought that was illegal."

"It is, sir. The paradoxes involved go beyond even our powers. No, sir," said Nellthu, with a sort of rueful admiration, "her third wish was stronger than that. She said: '*I wish that you fall permanently and unselfishly in love with me.*'"

"She was always logical," Martin admitted. "So for your own sake you had to make her beautiful and . . . adept, and since then you have been compelled to gratify her every little—"

He broke off and looked from the bed to the demon.

"How lucky for me that she included the word 'unselfishly'!"

"Yes, sir," said Nellthu.

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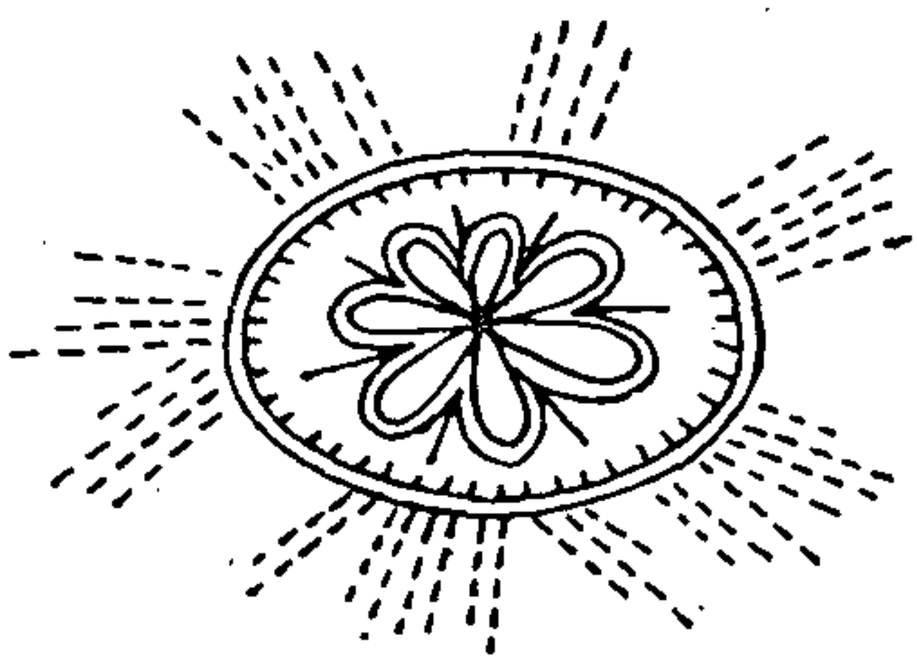

MURDERED VALLEY

BY HUGH ATKINSON

IF you are in those hills you will be taken to the valley and told this story.

In the early days of the colony, Martin Grey took passage out of Liverpool in a four-masted barque and sailed as an immigrant for Australia. He wasn't transported, he was his own free man and he was skilled with the saw and the hammer.

They say that he was a big man, exactly like his sons, with a black beard that covered his chest and that he was like a great polished rock in his purpose and as inflexible as a rock and terrifyingly righteous.

They say he went ashore in Sydney and took the saw and hammer and didn't mind the drunken soldiers and didn't mind the convicts' heartbreak and didn't mind the pale hostility of the silent, dreaming land. He laboured with his tools and his skill was prized and he helped to build the tumbled, troubled young city, on the blue harbour, amongst the lonely gum trees.

They say he married in that time and that his wife was a bonded woman, but nobody knows properly about that. There was a tin-type in a room in the house in the valley and she sat beside him in it, frail, pale and frightened-looking, her hands clasped in her lap, holding on to each other, and a cameo brooch pinned to the high neck of her sombre silk dress.

At the end of years, Martin Grey took his wife and the twin sons she had borne him, and the money he had saved, and he set out in a cart towards the great blue mountain barrier that had pinned the settlement to the coast. Here the explorers had forced, finally, an opening to the rich plains

of the inland. Halfway over the mountains, where a spring rose in a rich hill-shaded valley, he left the train of new settlers, labouring the foaming horses and the creaking wheels up and over the granite-slippery spurs and he settled in that valley and claimed it for himself.

In the course of time a house was built, axed out and sawed out and hammered out in the valley. A comfortable place of cool granite slabs and split and rosy cedar, with flowers planted and hedges growing and chickens at nest in the grass. Martin Grey raised his twins and traded corn, eggs, fruit, mutton, with the new settlers on their way to the inland and, later, with those others; the hurrying, stumbling, fever-eyed, flogging the desperate horses on and on to the goldfields that glittered on the mountains' other slopes.

Martin Grey was never tempted to follow. He had the twins to look to and the valley to look to and the Bible to read twice each day. He read the Bible when they buried the baby daughter born in the valley and he read the Bible when his wife died, still frail and pale and frightened-looking, worn out by work, worn out by love and fear of her strong, unbending husband; worn out by love and fear of her strong unbending sons, growing up grave and thick and silent in the image of their father—almost as though in his will he had produced them out of himself by cellular division, four more hands and four more legs to work his will in that valley.

Before Martin Grey went to his bed and lay down to die—with his great, knotted fists outside the covers, his black beard outside the covers and his two sons standing still in the room, waiting, waiting in the half-light of drawn curtains, their father's grey eyes holding them tight and no words between them—before he died, Martin had planted three thousand apple trees in the valley and had broken five hundred acres under the plough. The sweet spring water ran through the orchard and the garden and the pasture and neither flood nor drought altered the balance of its bubbling by a pint.

The twins were thirty-three when old Martin died. They made a cedar coffin for their father, made it with the same saws and hammers he had shipped out of Liverpool, and they buried old Martin alongside their mother and the baby sister they couldn't remember and Alec read over him from the Bible, because he was the older twin, by twenty-seven minutes.

Early and late the twins worked the valley. They seldom spoke to the hired hands who came to harvest the apples.

They cooked their own food and they kept their own counsel and the townspeople were puzzled whenever they spoke of them.

In the twins' fiftieth year, Alec, the elder, went into Warrawang, driving the gelding in the trap. He sat in the Bank Manager's office, clear grey eyes like old Martin, and his great humped fists like old Martin's, rested there on the table in front of him, humped and calloused and knotted.

He said: "Tom and me are fifty, today."

The Bank Manager said: "Indeed? Happy birthday," and smiled uncertainly.

"Tom and me need a son," Alec said. "Tom and me need a son to look to the Valley when Tom and me are gone."

The Bank Manager was young and wore a suit and came from the city. In the evenings, sometimes, he and his wife drank sherry before dinner in the thin, high-polished glasses his wife's mother had given them as a wedding present. He didn't know how to reply to Alec.

"And how can I help, Mr. Grey?"

Alec sat still, holding the Bank Manager with those clear, grey eyes of old Martin's, hard-forged inside the prism of his lifetime in that valley.

"We need a woman," he said. "We need a woman for Tom to marry with and have sons by."

Alec's gaze, grey and still, grappling the Bank Manager's distracted blue marbles, held and waited for an answer.

The Bank Manager cleared his throat, trying not to look at Alec.

At last he said: "That's something one usually has to arrange for oneself, isn't it?"

"In the city," Alec said, "there are women needing husbands. I want you to put a notice in the papers and get us a strong one."

There are many who remember Mary. Mary Grey who was Mary Gantling by her first marriage. She was thirty-five when she came to the valley, a simple woman, widowed by the war, a simple, good woman lonely for affection and comradeship and a home to call her own. She had worked as a cleaner in Sydney and had been in agony making up her mind to answer the advertisement the Bank Manager had written for the newspaper.

Alec drove the trap to the railway station to meet her and she and Tom were married that same afternoon in Warrawang Baptist Church, the twins silent, doing nothing to help, almost

impersonal in their massive withdrawal; she, blind and deaf with the need to summon courage.

Afterwards, when the marrying was over, Tom drove his wife back to the valley in the pony and trap and Alec rode behind on the gelding.

Mary's frightened heart must have lifted at the sight of the house, so pretty and pastoral in the rich shady valley, the cool stone walls and the split cedar and the sweet, apple-smell in all of the rooms.

But there was no love in that house. No love in that valley. It was implacable with purpose. Haunted with purpose. There was no love for Mary who was clean-built and simple. No love for Mary with her plain, lonely face and small, puzzled hands.

There was duty and purpose in the house and twice a day there was reading from the Bible.

In the mornings, when Mary Grey woke, the twins had long been gone, working with that terrible impassiveness of old Martin's, working the orchard and the crops, each year planting new trees, each year breaking new ground, a disease of compulsion now, an end and not a means.

Only when the sun set did they leave and come back to the house in the valley. They ate the food Mary had cooked and then Alec read from the Bible. Afterwards, he turned down the wick in the kerosene lamp and they went to their beds in the dark. Not for Mary the night-time comfort of her man beside her. Alec went to his room and Tom went to his room and after a while Mary went to hers.

Nor was it different when she got with child, three months after the marriage. But now their eyes were always laid on her, clear and expressionless, laid on her like a hand, following her everywhere, watching her belly, watching the way she moved, watching the things she did.

For almost a year Mary stuck it out in the valley. And then, one afternoon, while the twins worked the orchard, she couldn't bear it any longer. She packed her bag and harnessed the pony in the trap and drove to Warrawang Station.

The stationmaster made Mary Grey tea, she looked so sick and desperate, sitting there on the hard bench in the waiting-room, the child ready to be born, her heavy belly sagging between her legs where she sat. When Alec Grey got there, breathing hard, the gelding lathered at the hitching rail, he stood for a moment looking from the teacup to the stationmaster, saying nothing. Mary Grey just sat. Like a rabbit

hypnotised by a snake, as the stationmaster said afterwards.

"Get in the trap," Alec said softly. "Get in the trap. We're driving home."

It was weeks before anyone in Warrawang knew that Mary Grey had had her baby, that an heir had come to the valley. The twins called no midwife, called no doctor. They delivered Mary themselves. Delivered her with those great humped hands that helped whelp the dogs, helped lamb the sheep, helped foal the mares. It was a son, too. A little boy with the given name of Martin.

They say that the twins took the baby away from Mary when it was weaned. That they carried it up the valley each day in a basket and kept it beside them while they worked. There was none of old Martin in the boy and none of Tom and none of Alec. It was pale and frail and frightened and it looked like its grandmother and sometimes like its mother.

Little Martin was three when Mary died. She fell on the scythe in the milkshed and cut her wrist and bled to death. They say, too, that Mary Grey didn't fall on that scythe. That Mary wasn't right in her head after the brothers took her baby away and that her heart was broken and that she used that scythe. The twins buried Mary, and Alec got out the Bible and read over her.

The twins worked the valley and little Martin grew up, a thin, shy child who seldom answered the crews who came each year to harvest the apples. He used to watch them in the cool green leaves of the apple trees, standing on the ladders, dropping the red, ripe fruit into the baskets, laughing and joking and calling to each other but he seldom answered when the men called to him.

Five years after his mother died, little Martin got sick. The twins dosed him with sugar and black molasses and fed him eucalyptus out of a spoon but it was pleurisy by the time Tom rode in for the doctor. The doctor did what he could, the twins standing over him, splitting him with their eyes, but it was too late for little Martin.

They say that after the boy died and the twins put him away on the hill, they wouldn't speak to anyone. Not even to Bill Cosgrove, who had brought their supplies for thirty years and who had to leave the bags of flour and sugar at the gate after that and get the money out of the letterbox.

But the twins kept working. The twins kept planting and ploughing and breaking new ground and that valley was something to see.

Tom Grey was seventy-three when he died, bitten by a tiger-snake where it nested in the warm, fallen leaves of the apple trees. Alec buried him with the others and read the Bible over him and it was some time before the townspeople knew that old Tom Grey had gone. Not long afterwards, Alec fell down in the field where he was working, with a sword of pain in his chest. He lay there, alone, for a long time, before he was strong enough to get back to the house.

They say he began to go into town about that time, driving in the trap, and that he would go straight to the Bank Manager's office, a new one now, and not answer the people who spoke to him in the street.

They say he came in every day for a long time and there would be voices raised in the Bank Manager's office and that one day a lawyer came all the way from Sydney to sit in the bank and talk to Alec.

They say that when Alec got his way, helped by the lawyer, that the Bank Manager was silent and deeply troubled for days. Alec Grey was in his eightieth year when Bill Cosgrove found him, stretched out dead at the gate where he had gone to get the supplies. The whole township went out for the funeral, to see Alec buried on the hill where he had buried the others and hear someone reading over him at last. They poked and pried in the valley and poked and pried in the house and the police sergeant had to clear them from the valley.

There had been many greedy eyes looking to Grey's Valley, calculating the cost and seeing themselves master in that house. Old Alec hadn't got comfortable in his grave before the Bank Manager had his callers. But there wasn't anything they could do and nothing the Bank Manager could do and nothing anyone could do about Grey's Valley.

If you travel that road chipped out by the convicts labouring in the sun in their chains, there's a humped stone bridge where the valley spring runs a rivulet under the road.

Under the blue mountain peaks the valley descends in a rushing river of green. The house is tumbled and stripped bare by the townsfolk and the great apple orchard is ruined. The spring still bubbles where the garden was and the finches and diamond sparrows nest in the uproarious hedges. The grass hides the graves on the hill. It's a long time now since anyone called it Grey's Valley. Old Alec left enough money to pay the taxes for ever and a trustee to see that nobody lives there. That's why it's called Murdered Valley now.

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Women Always Know

BY DARRELL BATES

"I'M sure," she said, to underline the doubt in her mind, "that George has got a woman somewhere."

She was forty-eight, and well-preserved like the sort of cutlery that is kept on the sideboard in wooden boxes, velvet lined and only used when there are guests. There was, when one came to think of it, something of the fork about Marjorie Unsworth, a well-designed fork of course, like the ones you see at the Design Centre in the Haymarket or in advertisements in the *New Yorker*. There was something of the spoon about her too and something of the knife. She had been married to George Unsworth for over twenty years. She had been very handsome as a girl.

On the other side of the low Spanish table Miss Weston moved her buttocks stealthily across the consoling roughness of the cane-bottomed chair. The temperature was eighty-one —she had seen the thermometer inside the bank in the Plaza of the Second of May; she always had that sort of trouble when it went over seventy-nine. Why is she telling me? she wondered. She knows it couldn't possibly be me. She thumbed through the names of her friends and their faces and their foundation garments.

No, she decided finally, Marjorie must just be saying it to attract attention. "It's awfully hot, isn't it?" She paused. "Why, has George been away?"

"No, he's not been away."

Anthea Weston was English too. They had known one another in Kenya before they had come to Spain. She could see the sea through the open window; it reflected the sun like

a blue metal sheet. Beyond it on the other side of the bay were the mountains, bare and brown, drained of everything but shape.

"Then how do you know? I mean, if it was someone here..."

"I know," Marjorie Unsworth said, "I just know."

In the narrow cobbled street below a man was shouting, "There is fish, there is fish." A cat mewed at the smell but it didn't stir. What a country, Anthea thought, even the cats talk and never act. She had never married, and it was only if you were married, Marjorie's voice had implied, that one Just Knew. "Oh," she said.

"Yes. I can see it in his eyes, in the way he walks, in the way he doesn't listen when I talk." She shut her eyes. "I know just what that means. There can be no mistake."

"But surely... well, that's not exactly evidence is it? I mean..." She could put words on paper, they came fluently when she was alone, when she wrote her secret verse, but she got tongue-tied when she tried to talk. She lit a cigarette. "I mean... then there's not much you can do, is there?"

"Oh yes there is." She stood up; she started to walk about the room. She wore dark blue slacks cut off below the knee, and a yellow shirt. Her skin, where one could see it at the neck and the ankles and the arms, was taut with lines and cords, it seemed to have no softness in it anywhere. "Oh yes there is. And that," she added, "is where you come in."

"Me?" Anthea was glad she had lit a cigarette; it gave one more time in answering. Marjorie's husband George drank too much and used a lot of common words. George was an American, he had gone out to Kenya to hunt elephant. We people, he had said once, who live in cities and have money and all the ease that comes from cars and cans and Dunlopillo mattresses, we need to justify ourselves in ways like that; we have to prove our manhood by shooting things, by going to the distant places. So he had gone to Kenya to hunt elephant and met Marjorie and stayed. Anthea wondered in what way she was expected to help.

"Yes." Marjorie put out her hand for a cigarette. She was used to having people put cigarettes into her slim, knowledgeable fingers when she reached out. Anthea gave her one, and lit it for her. "Mind you, I've tried. I've been through his pockets and smelled his shirts and looked at his handkerchiefs, all that sort of elementary stuff. And letters—everything."

"Have you...?" She wanted to say something helpful but although she was everybody's confidante she was more a listener than a counsellor. But she knew a lot about Marbella and Southern Spain, she talked a little Spanish, she had a mantilla and one of those mantelpiece dancers with frills and legs. "She knows the country," people said with scorn. Most of them didn't bother, and then made a virtue of their ignorance—to speak Spanish when one lived in Spain became un-English and un-American.

"Have I what?"

"Well...I mean...asked people? Like the maid, and the post office and the barman, people like that?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that. Not with foreigners." She stubbed out her cigarette. "No. It's got to be you."

"What do you want me to do?"

"To find out, of course. What else?"

"But how?"

"I'm going to go away. For a week or two. I want you to come in and keep house for him. You know, just an hour or so every day, to do the ordering. He won't be so careful with you and..."

Anthea looked down at her hands. It wasn't only her hands that were large and square—she was, she knew, a sort of monument of shapelessness; only her ears were small and delicately whorled. She's picked on me because I'm safe, because I'm a nonentity. "And what?" she asked.

"Well..." Marjorie frowned. She expected other people, other women anyway, to see the obvious. "I'll be away, won't I?"

When the cat's away the mouse will play and we women must stick together. Anthea knew all the clichés of married women now. "All right," she said, "I'll see what I can do."

George Unsworth sat in the only room which he could call his own. It was a large house; he had also inherited an income. He used the room for writing. The stories he wrote appeared under different names, his own and several others.

"You might have some consideration for other people," his wife had once said after she had read one of his stories. "All this stuff about what goes on in people's minds is indecent; it's like taking off one's clothes in public."

His agent didn't like it either. Readers expect an author to stick to the same line; they don't like children's stories and sex coming from the self-same pen. They think it's unnatural.

"Come in," he said.

"I'm sorry," Anthea said, "but I wondered if there's anything you want before I go."

"Aw hell!" He pushed the sheets of paper aside, "let's have a drink." What a lump she was and yet how kind. She had been keeping house for him for a week.

"You drink too much, George." She wasn't so tongue-tied with him now. He was a good listener; he made her feel that she had something to say.

"Wouldn't *you*?" He had underlined the you. She didn't know what he meant or rather she didn't think she did and she didn't like to ask. She had made up her mind already what to say to Marjorie when she got back. A week of looking after this too-much-drinking, too-much-swearing, too-much-dependent man had unsettled her instinctive female loyalties. Underneath the surface he was considerate; he looked at her ears instead of her hands.

"Marjorie thinks you've got a woman somewhere."

He put his glass on the table. He looked out of the window at the sea. There was a fishing-boat and voices distantly. The temperature was eighty-three. There was a long pause.

"I have," he said. He got up and poured himself another drink. "She's right, I have."

"I'm sorry. I..." She flushed at the back of her neck; she knew it wasn't a pleasant sight, it hadn't even been pleasant when her neck had been young and smooth. "I didn't mean to..."

"How do you know, anyway?" His voice was hostile now, and hard.

"One hears things. All these people. People with nothing to do."

"She told you, didn't she?"

Anthea wasn't a good liar, not with men. She didn't say anything, already perhaps she had said too much. She reached for a cigarette. The smoke cooled and soothed her; she blew it on her hands. "I wanted to warn you. That's all."

He sat down. He looked at his shoes. He looked at the pattern of the tiles. "You're nice," he said. "Shall I tell you something?"

In the street below a donkey brayed. It was such a heart-breaking lonely sound that all the solitary people who heard it, the old and the widowed and the unloved, felt less unhappy and less lonely because of it.

"I've got a woman, yes, I've got one in there." He pointed

at the door of the small room. He picked up his glass, then put it down. "You don't know what I mean do you?"

She knew what he meant. She knew it as soon as he pointed at the door. She hadn't written verse, solitary verse, for nothing all these years. "No," she said, "you'll have to explain."

"I fall in love with them every time. Every time I write a story with a woman in it I fall in love with her. It's silly isn't it? Often I start with a character. I plan to make her mean or stupid or plain but always the redeeming features start to creep in. The mean are only mean because someone did them dirt, the stupid have hearts of gold, the plain are lovely underneath." He was talking to himself now; he had forgotten she was there. "I get bored with the good ones and the pretty ones, I just write them for the money."

He raised his head and looked into her face. She hasn't got a bad face he thought, her eyes are good and there is compassion in her mouth and gentleness. "Are you with me?" he asked. "Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes," she said. She had thought this was something that only happened to people who lived alone, to people like herself.

"Well," he went on, "I'm writing a long short story now. Neither flesh nor fowl my agent says. I've been writing it for weeks. The woman in it is a bad one, she's given me a lot of trouble. I've been having hell's own time trying to find the soft spots underneath the outer skin, the gentle qualities, the innocence underneath the sin. It's taken a long time and now I love her so much I can't bear to let her go. You see, as soon as I end a story and send it off the thing is finished, the *affaire* is over. I can't finish this one, it just goes on and on . . ." He looked and saw her watching him. "You understand don't you? Yes, I can see you do." He reached out and touched her hand. "One day I might even write a story about you."

She took her hand away. He had had too much to drink of course.

"What," she said, "am I going to do?"

"Tell her," he said, "I can't. But you can. If you tell her she might understand."

She smiled. "You don't know much about women do you? Not real women. You live with your make-believe girls, the good under the surface of the bad, the beautiful below the plain. Real women are mostly the other way round. Virtue

is the veneer of a surprising amount of sin and beauty is the façade of a great deal of ugliness."

"You're quite a philosopher, aren't you? What are you going to tell my wife?"

"It's no use my telling her the truth. I don't think she'd believe it, anyway. Do you know, I think I'd like another drink." She sipped at her drink, like an animal at a forest pool, George thought, that keeps looking around for enemies, but suddenly she tipped it up and drained the glass.

"Do you want to make your wife happy?"

"Yes," George said, "at least I ought to, oughtn't I?"

"Yes," Miss Weston said, "you ought."

He laughed.

"I don't think she minds so much your having another woman. What worries her is not knowing for sure and not knowing who it is."

"Yes," George said, "that's probably right."

"And if she knew there wasn't one she would be very disappointed. It would show that she was wrong. And she likes to be right. You know," she added, touching her glass, "it's funny, but this stuff helps to make one think."

"Yes. It's odd isn't it? Well, what do you suggest?"

"We'll have to think of something won't we? We wouldn't want Marjorie to be unhappy, now would we?"

"There's a bar in the square called the Twenty-Six. Let's go there, you and me. As you say, this stuff helps one to think."

Marjorie looked better for her holiday. She had been to Tangier. "It's full," she said, "of the most interesting people."

"Ah," George said. He was sealing up an envelope. "It's another story. It's taken me a long time to write."

"I hope Anthea's been looking after you all right?"

George was writing the address. "Yeah," he said. He stuck on the stamps. "She's been fine."

"I think I'd better go and see her. To see if I owe her anything."

"Yes. You do that, dear." He even opened the door for her.

"Well," Anthea said modestly when she and Marjorie had finished with polite preliminaries, "it wasn't as difficult as I had thought. I followed him, you see."

"But he only goes out to the Twenty-Six and I checked with

someone who goes there. He doesn't go anywhere else, except with me . . ."

"There was a block of flats," Anthea sxplained, "on the way to the Twenty-Six. In one of them there was a Swedish girl, she used to sunbathe on her balcony. He never spoke to her, just looked and waved but you know what men are. He fell hopelessly in love with her."

"But he seems all right now. Back to normal I mean."

"Yes, he's finished . . . I mean she's gone. She was only here on holiday."

Marjorie frowned, then smiled. "So in a way I was right, wasn't I?"

"Yes. You were right."

"It's funny, isn't it, how we always know?"

There was a man in the street below selling fruit. "There are oranges," he called, "there are figs." The temperature was eighty-four. In the distance a dog barked and someone laughed.

"Yes," Anthea said, "isn't it?"

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"It popped up, shuddered and went back!"

PAUL DARCY BOLES

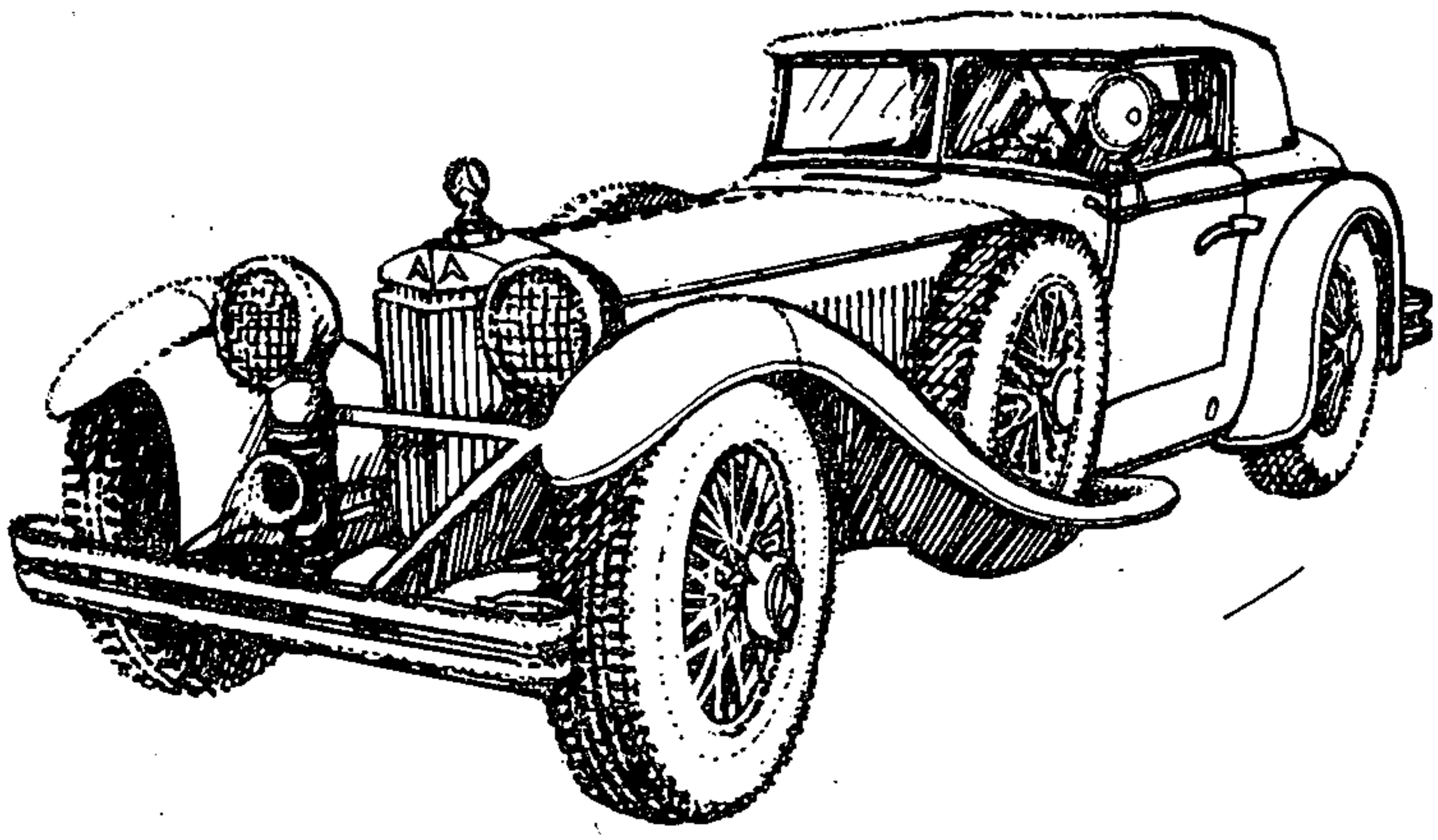
The flank of the car shone out—an entire past, a lost era, came tangibly into being . . .

BIG BEAST

THERE are times in everyone's youth when the whole sense and meaning of being young comes up like a wave and leaves in its path for ever a warm, bone-deep residue of strength and rightness. These peaks can stand for the whole power of a moment or a week or a year or seventy years. This is why I have to tell about the summer when my brother, R.C.—Renfield Cotton—and I found the car in MacLloyd's garage.

It was a Saturday in summer, with expansiveness and joy on the air. The whole morning floated, along with all the cabbage butterflies, from grass blade to grass blade, not steering, only zigzagging and roving.

After breakfast R.C. said, looking down his high-bridged nose, "Want to play catch?" and I said yes, because it was a proper day for it and because I considered it an honour. R.C. was in his second year at medical school and he'd been working like the devil; he had a night job at college, which helped, and his grades were high. When he had come home for the summer he'd been thin and washed-out, cheekbones showing strongly under the dark-grey eyes; now he was developing a tan and he looked a shade heavier, the plates of muscle not glued so close to the bone. He also had a summer job at Parter's Pharmacy; but on this day he was off, and that made the day even more expansive. Sun streamed through the vines beside the kitchen window and made patterns of shadow



over his close-cut black hair. Our parents were downtown shopping—a Saturday ritual. All around outside the house I could hear bees working, and a couple of pigeons under the porch-roof eaves.

I got up and went to the closet and got a couple of mitts and a well-used baseball with old grass stains on its hide, and we went out past the lilacs into the side yard, near the grape arbours. The grapes were just swelling into season, turning plump and dark with a white dust over them that tasted strange and wild and sweet when you took them between your teeth and spat out the skins, *thoo*; large, fat Concords, and you could smell them a long way off. Birds flashed in the high oaks, and the yard was a dapple of sun and shade.

R.C. stationed himself at one end of the yard and I stood at the other, and he pulled on his mitt while I worked my hand into mine. I was sixteen. Nights, I went to sleep dreaming of women, and mornings, I woke up having dreamed of them. I had girlfriends, but they were nice, neighbourhood girls and whenever I spotted the gleam of exploration in the eyes of one of them it was always at a time or place that inhibited my terrible need to know more. I was clumsy and shy and poetic and sometimes mean. I lived alternately in a hell of desire and the need to give.

All this went through me as I gazed at R.C. down at the end of the yard. He was twenty-two; he had girls of his

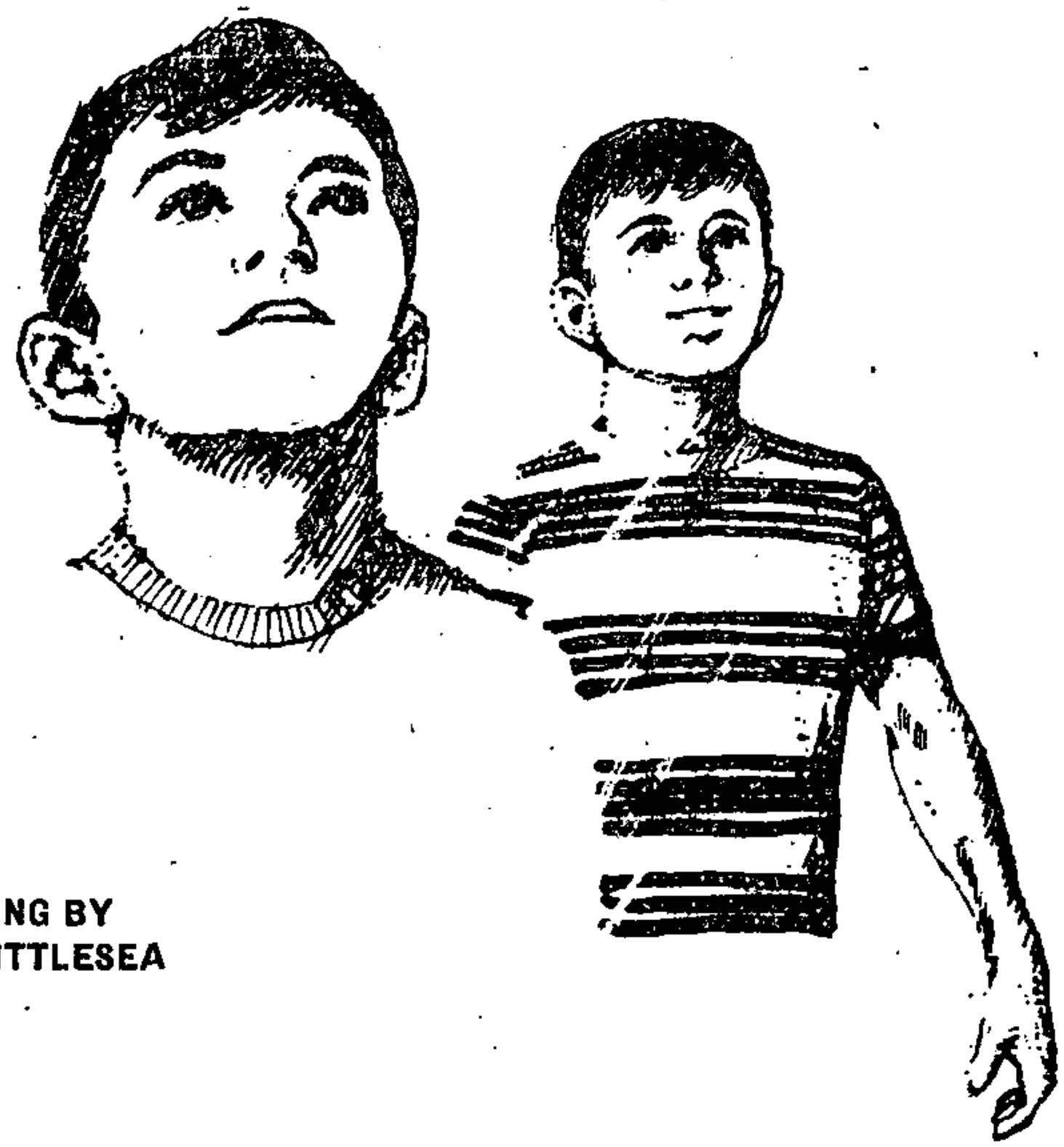
own. He loved women with a running current of passion that didn't ruffle the surface. I think he would have made a good husband, because only such men do. They value women for how fine they are and what they can be, and what they value they cherish and develop. I have often thought of how R.C. knew enough to cherish the marvellous thing that is woman. He didn't have to tell me this; it showed in silent ways and sometimes on the faces of his girls.

Now I let the first pitch go, giving it the best steam I had, a fair country pitch, and he leapt as it left my hand, going up from the grass all at once, his arm shooting high and the glove appearing small against the blue of sky, and then there was a quick smack and the ball was in his hand with no trouble. It was a good pitch but my control was off, as usual, and he'd snagged it with the ease and dexterity he could summon whenever he wanted them.

I called, "Nice stop."

Voice coming full and soft across the grass, he called back, "Luck, for God's sake, I barely got it." But it wasn't luck; it was a good omen for the day. A day like that—and even whole strings of days, sometimes weeks—you can do anything.

He didn't wind up; he never wound up even when he pitched for the high-school team. He aimed, squinting slightly,



DRAWING BY
M. WHITTLESEA

taking his time, judging the distance and assessing his right arm's force and feeling the ball in his fingers.

The first year that he'd pitched in high school he had not bought a uniform but had done the trick in an old shirt and flannels, the green and white school colours visible only on his limp-brimmed baseball cap. It wasn't scorn of conformity that made him do this and it wasn't the fact that he couldn't have in some manner scrounged a uniform, either. It was simply that he had other uses for the money that came in, and since there was never a lot of it he had achieved an individualistic uniform which nobody, not even the coach, objected to after a while. I was thinking of this even while he let the ball go.

It was so fast I couldn't even see it, but I stabbed for it; then there was a tearing of leaves as it whipped up through the lower boughs of a tree. I called, "Sorry!"

He called back, "Okay. It was high." He came loping over to me. "Nuts, it was a mile over your head. Control like a back gate."

We walked over towards the trees through which the ball had ploughed. I said, "Damn it, you got mine!"

"Fluke," he said. "Don't get so mad."

I said, "Who's *mad*? I like that ball, that's all. That ball's been around a while."

"You're a tough kid," he said. "You know? You're a very tough brat."

"I try to be," I said, feeling better. We walked under the trees, in the deep, green-gold shine, looking for the ball; it was a bowerlike, enchanting place, and I thought that if I had a real girl I would bring her here some still afternoon. But the ball wasn't anywhere there, so we kept on walking and then we were in MacLloyd's side yard. This was the home of old Mr. MacLloyd, who was in his seventies. At one time he'd been lieutenant governor of the state and after that a power—the sort they used to call a kingmaker—in local politics. The house was built along the lines of our house but it was a little more run-down, a leftover from the post-Victorian time in America when people built for enormous families with much waste space and rolling acres of lawns. All the yards here were overgrown now, and everything felt alien and odd. The maples and oaks and pines seemed more settled and sunk in their roots; they had the appearance of trees nobody much looks at, or ever climbs. All the boughs needed pruning and in places roofed your head so you were wholly in shadow as

you walked, and the smell of the long grasses and clover was ranker here, the noise of our feet moving making a whisper around our ankles.

I said, "Haunted. Home of Doctor Fu Manchu."

R.C. said, "Peaceable, though." He'd folded his mitt and shoved it in a side pocket. He stopped and took a deep breath and looked over towards a summerhouse that had a pergola in its centre and thrust up from the dark grasses behind the kitchen wing of the house.

R.C. said, "Once, when I was about five I sneaked out at night. They were having a party over here. A lot of Japanese lanterns strung around, people going in and out of the summerhouse, a butler with a bowl of punch, a few musicians—I guess they had a string quintet. It sounded fine through the trees. I looked through the hedge for a long time, then I went back to bed. Next day I had a hell of a summer cold. Somebody'll buy all this sometime—tear it down flat and build something useful."

Then he was quiet, and I thought he was giving me something of his past, a small piece of it to do with what I wanted to, but there was nothing to answer. And the day was pulsing with animation around us, and the yard was so quiet. I looked sideways at him, and his eyes were narrow; he was staring around carefully, arms folded, all poised and searching. I looked away, at the yard, and started to scour every inch with care, letting my eyes pick out only a small area at a time. But he saw the ball first.

Next second, when he'd started for it, I could see it too. It had rolled about five feet from the corner of what in the old days had been the carriage house. Now morning-glories rioted up one whole carriage-house wall, and grasses encroached all the way to the doors. The ball lay on a section of cracked concrete where, long before, somebody had paved this entrance after the carriage house became a garage. I scooped up the ball, straightened and tossed it a couple of times in my right hand. I was wheeling around when I caught a glimpse of something shining through a grime-smeared carriage-house pane. I stepped to the window.

Inside, emerging from an interior drowned in gloom, I saw in a sun-shaft the left rear bumper of a huge automobile. Even this small section of the car caught my imagination like fire. I was shading my eyes with both hands, plastering my forehead against the pane.

I said, "R.C. Take a look here." I could hear him coming

on through the grass. The bumper there in the sun-shaft was a brilliant blue, polished as a jewel even in that dusty place.

R.C. was at my side, his face close to another pane; he shaded his eyes. "Well, by God," he said.

I remembered as we stood there how, from the time he was thirteen or fourteen and I was seven or eight, he had interested me in building models of old cars. That time had ceased as he grew away from me, and the models had been given to me, and after that they did not mean so much.

I thought of this as his voice came again: "Thought he got rid of it a long time back. Mercedes. About a 1929. Come over to this side of the window." He stepped back, and I moved over. "Look hard right. You can see part of the radiator. And a little of the blower pipes."

I looked, and there they were: the heavy nickel radiator, the three-pronged emblem star. And I could begin to make out the shape of the entire automobile. It was a screamer, a biter of rubber and highways. The radiator, dull from here, was savage and enormous; the rakish, go-to-hell lines were massive, and the blower pipes projected from the hood like a giant's muscles.

I said, hardly hearing my own voice, "You think he'd mind —if we—"

I stopped because R.C. was talking: "I doubt if anybody'd mind if we—"

Then we were glancing at each other, smiling a little, and after that we walked around the carriage-house corner. The side door was not inviting, but we weren't asking for an invitation. It was fitted with hasps, even the screw slots rusted, but there was no lock. The door gave a harsh, wooden sigh as I pushed it open. Outside light spilled into the carriage house; it burned along the whole hood of the Mercedes, which seemed to go on and on after most cars' hoods would have stopped. Through the raging dust-motes the flank of the car shone out. An entire past—a gone era, a time lost and invisible—came tangibly into being with a single leap; part of this was the smell of leather from the seats, and the special smell even the grease had; but the whole was more than the sum of the parts.

I thought then—and think now—that the automobile we stood looking at was like a woman of great beauty and power, fierceness of desire. She could be generous and forgiving and wasteful of her life, but she could also be mightily fastidious and chary in her giving. She asked for, required, a man.

After a few seconds, R.C. walked around on the wheel side —it angled up on the right—and opened the door. The door didn't protest; it opened under his fingers as though it had been waiting for him. R.C.'s nose wrinkled. "She's been greased good, and she's on blocks all around."

We regarded each other across half the length of the car, he from beside the steering wheel, I from near the radiator shell. For a long, beating moment there wasn't anything but speculation between us, the wings of need flapping in the semi-darkness. It was cooler here than it was in the sunlight. On my forearms gooseflesh rose and prickled.

R.C. said, with great casualness, "Least we can do is talk to old man MacLloyd."

I said, "Okay," almost as casually. "Only first let's look her over a little more."

That was how the summer of the Mercedes came into being; it happened in just that seemingly easy and incredible way. Old Mr. MacLloyd had been an invalid for some time; his housekeeper, Mrs. Fisher, was a petty and often militant tyrant concerning his health. At first, she wasn't even going to let us see him and talk to him about the automobile. But R.C. was doggedly polite, and insistent at the same time. He treated her as he might have treated a YWCA secretary whose guard he had first to flatten before advancing upon her delectable daughter, with tenderness and understanding. He finally won her over and she muttered and capitulated, and said we could have a brief interview with the old man. I couldn't have done it; I'd have lost my temper or given up. But he did it as he always did everything important to him—working at a medical education or, at the last, learning the craft of war—politely and firmly, and with a drive beneath the words and all the cajolery that went straight to what was important.

When we did get in to see him, Mr. MacLloyd was pleasant enough; a shrivelled, ground-down little man with the complexion of a bleached hazel-nut, a spray of freckles across the pale forehead, and a tall fund of stories about the past, which R.C.'s mention of the car immediately touched off.

R.C. did the bulk of the talking for our cause. Patient again, he steered the conversation around dozens of detours and innumerable swamps of nostalgia, back each time to the car. It was almost three o'clock in the afternoon, and my belly was growling and I was trying not to stare stonily at Mrs. Fisher each time she appeared in the doorway to shake

her head and mutter, when we finally came to an agreement.

Head tipped back against his wicker-basket chair, a grey shawl with woolly orange flowers about his neck, Mr. MacLloyd said, "All right, all right. As a rule I'd say no. But you look like thinkers and you talk like you know what she is, and you haven't tried to beat me down or made any damned-fool low offers. I know what she's worth; got a fair idea what I could get for her. I'll let you fix her up and drive her for this summer. Not a bad investment on my part; she needs driving—it'll do her good." He coughed and pulled the shawl in closer around his chin. His eyes were vague and tired but with a ghost of enthusiasm flitting through them from time to time. "I'll have to have her back when the summer's over, though. I'm not a rich man. Once I was—comparatively. But now—well, I've had a good life and I don't complain much. Don't even complain"—his fingers moved over the wicker arm, crawling and aimless, trying to say more than he could—"don't even complain when that old bag chews me out." Then Mrs. Fisher left the doorway and stamped back into the kitchen, where she rattled china and walloped pots in a steady protest. "So when I'm gone the car'll be needed to help pay off things, here and there. Well, that's it."

And that was the way the deal was made, that simply. In the stuffy darkened room—the whole house was achingly dark inside, holding an aura of medicinal rust, and there were many photographs of Mr. MacLloyd's political cronies peering from the walls and from all corners—I was feeling so peculiar and hungry that I didn't take in the full sense of what had happened. Not then. And I still failed to appreciate it even when we shook hands on the deal, and started moving out of the house, saying our goodbyes with respect. It wasn't until we'd murmured the final goodbye to Mrs. Fisher on the back steps and were out in the full flood of sunlight that I realised what we had. I glanced at R.C. There were certainly no large differences in how he looked. But his eyes were shining a little, a smoky shine I recalled from the days when he would have acquired a new package containing a model car, and he'd be laying out the glue and the parts fresh from the box. He said, "All right, that's done. Here we go."

We were walking across the backyard to the carriage house. My feet felt light, suddenly, in the long grass, the foot-singing grass. The day was immediate and hot and flooding around me. I only nodded and said, "That's good, damn good."

Then came the night work; and it was a good thing it was summer, because I'd never have been able to pay the least attention in school after all those hours under a swinging, wire-caged bulb working over that engine, that beautiful, intricate, proud, and man-resisting engine. I am not a mechanic by nature; you either are or you aren't. But there is a middle ground of doggedness and admiration which will not be denied and R.C. had enough inborn skill for both of us.

My father was interested and on many nights he joined us, and sometimes on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, too. I have a picture in my head of R.C. with grease up to his armpits, my father bent over the manual for the Mercedes with his forehead wrinkled like a cap of cobwebs as he tries to decipher the translation side of the manual, which was still half German and half a strange, incomprehensible Esperanto, and me with the parts of the carburettor spread out like a Chinese puzzle, or Chinese torture, around the floor, and the light bulb swinging, and the moths flapping around it to cast large, variable shadows over the car's blue hood. Such pictures stay with you.

In another picture of those nights, R.C. crouches beside me, in the overalls he has changed into each evening as soon as he hits the house on the rebound from his drugstore job; and he is wearing an expression of clean intensity, as though he has at last found a hobby which will match his expectation of life. As if he were an arrow that had found its target. Outside, there's moonlight and you can smell the night-blooming stock all the way from our house, as it drifts in the open garage doors. There is a communion of feeling strong as the earth and the night itself.

These pictures, in all their shifting and all their meanings, are overlaid with others—with the morning, for instance, of another Saturday, when we rolled the Mercedes out of the garage for the first time, moving her down that cracked strip of concrete under her own rumbling power. We'd had to buy new tyres; even with the car on blocks, the tyres had rotted. But we'd got tyres through an ad we put in a car magazine, dithering a great deal about the price; and now she wore the tyres, and she had been brought alive, and all the engine work was over, and the testing was over—and on this day she emerged into the sun like a dragon from its lair.

I've seen many cars since then, and some of them have been made by Mercedes-Benz, but all have been like eating store cake after having bitten the hot, earthy bread of the gods.

R.C. drove her on that first occasion, which was as it should have been. I sat, almost holding my breath, on the deep leather seat next to him, my left hand touching the fine-textured leather which we had washed and washed again and treated with leather wax until it had the soft shine of a live animal's hide.

He proceeded with marvellous care down the drive, going slowly as we came near the street so the overgrown MacLloyd bushes wouldn't scratch her paint. Her chrome shone like daggers in the day, each gleam a reward for the infinite hours spent polishing. There weren't many people out that morning, on the sidewalks or in the street; it was a wide street like a placid river, and quiet, as a rule, and at first nobody much noticed us.

R.C. turned her into our driveway at home and gave two modest, abbreviated jolts on the horn—it was a three-tone combination, like an angry fox with a sweet voice, which we'd rewired—and our parents came out.

About the same time, a group of small children—the Fasers from across the street, the Gember children from down on the north corner—came as if in response to the Pied Piper, appearing suddenly and silently. I looked at them steadily, and they stood where they were, not coming a step closer.

R.C. said to Mother, "Get in and have a ride."

I got out, she got in, and she sat rather lightly, on the edge of the seat, angled forward a bit, her hands in her lap as if she expected to hear a splendid sermon. Her red hair lifted and flew in the slight breeze as R.C. reversed down the drive; he took her, with vast sedateness, around the block. She smiled sweetly upon getting down, and said it was very nice, but that it was a bit loud, and she would, after all, prefer the family car as her usual mode of transportation.

Our father, cocking his head and holding it low to the hood, said, "She sounds smooth. Not a miss," and then he collected our mother and the two set out on their Saturday shopping rounds.

By this time the crowd of children had increased, and I gave them a narrow-eyed look, and R.C. said, "Your turn," and slid over on the right. I, too, drove around the block; this time many of the children followed along behind, some skipping, others jogging or quick-stepping, and I resisted the terrible temptation to step down hard on the accelerator, and kept the speed at a steady five or six miles an hour. In the flashing mirrors I could see the children's faces and arms and legs as

they streamed out behind, creating a traffic hazard. I felt strong irritation towards them, and below the irritation, in a strip like another layer of being, the fondness and the humour and the ambition of being their age, the terrible open joy of it. I completed the circuit, and cut the ignition. In the warm sun the car, this she-beast, sat haughtily beneath us, steel and leather and a little glass, and now the children came closer and laid hands on her, and I shut my eyes but let them touch her.

After that first day, we got more accustomed to driving her, but never in the sense that either of us could forget for an instant that she was there. She required attention; you did not forget her.

Among my pictures of the summer is one of R.C. coming up to me as I stand looking at my shadowed self in the hall mirror after dinner, and of him saying, "Go ahead, take her on your date. I don't want her tonight." He looks at me calmly, and goes on, "Promised 'em I'd work tonight at the drugstore; fill in. Here." And he holds out the ignition key and I take it. It is a big, distinctive piece of well-shaped metal with the weight and feel of a key to some hidden treasure house. There are a thousand things I want to say, but I don't say them. I say, "Thanks," and go to the telephone to call a girl.

Then it is later that night as the girl and I are going down the Hadley Mill Road, outside town, returning from seeing a movie in Hadley. I glance towards the girl. She is a nice girl and a neighbourhood girl and at the same time she is so exciting she makes a pulse bump in my wrists and makes me look back quickly towards the rushing road. I feel I will say or do something instinctive that will brand me in her eyes as an evil-doer and may even jerk this lovely car out from under me. The cheeks are quickened by the wind and her eyes have a fey look; she stays before me even though I am looking very hard at the road and driving with keen skill and perfect attention. We growl along at a steady pace, and we go over the Hadley Mill Bridge, the great wheels rumbling its wooden slats and making them echo, and when we are on the other side my foot moves lower on the accelerator, because there is a straight stretch ahead, no side roads, nothing in sight. I say, "Hang on," and she hangs on, moving closer to me as she does, though I don't know this in that single moment. All at once the blower cuts in. The blower pipes scream as they go into action through the fragrant cattle-and-night-smelling air, and we are shot forward, our backs driven into the seats as

though giant hands held us there, while everything ghosts past as in a dream of flying.

Later the girl, the nice girl, says, low-voiced, "Park a while in the shadow," and I pull up under an elm fairly far from her house, which has a wide lawn; and she says, "Come here," and I attempt to be very quiet and expert, but I am not; this is all right, as she is not expert, either. We forgive each other our inexpertness, which does not seem to matter in the long run; there is sometimes a willingness of the wild heart more honest and more kind than caution. And afterwards, with the Mercedes and all her power parked next to our old family car in the garage at home, I come around the house and sit on the steps a while. It is about two in the morning; I can hear noises of the darkness so clearly it is as if I had never heard them before, night birds singing like ice in the moist trees.

At the end of summer, when it was time for R.C. to go back to college, time for me to go back to high school, we returned the car. In October of that year Mr. MacLloyd died, and the car, along with his house—I've often wondered what happened to the photographs of his old friends which hung in shadows—was sold as the estate was settled. We had a feeling of loss when we took the Mercedes back, but we'd expected it; we were built up for it. Not everybody could have known a summer like the one we'd had. I seriously doubt that it would be possible to have a similar summer by simply buying a similar car.

Now, among other pictures of the time is one of R.C. packing before he leaves for school. We casually divide each other's socks into two piles. We talk a little about the Christmas holidays, when he'll be home again. Not an important picture, and no dialogue to speak of in it; yet it is as lucid to me as anything about the Mercedes was, and I can see him standing in the fresh September light. He looks up. "Good summer, you know, brat?"

"The best," I say.

That's all for then. After that comes school and its problems and the beautiful complexity which never becomes simple, or straightens out in a clear line, till much later. And before the Christmas vacation there is a letter from R.C., laconic but to the point, telling us that he is enlisting because Pearl Harbour has happened. Then there are many more letters from R.C., none of them long, most of them humorous. Some

of the last letters, coming years later, mention in a roundabout way, which the censor doesn't quite get, that he and his outfit will be moving out before long. I remember that I thought then, He could get as far as Stuttgart, and see the Mercedes-Benz works if there's anything left by then.

He didn't get to Stuttgart. Or Berlin, either. He was killed in the Bulge. I do not think he forgot the summer we had, and I doubt that he hated the enemy who killed him. I think he probably kept to the end the male pride and satisfaction that we'd been privileged to follow, to its finish, a youthful dream. He loved greatness, and women; and since they are both worth it, that can be a true love. He had the idea of mankind going all out for beauty. Sometime there'll be another like him, and he will live.

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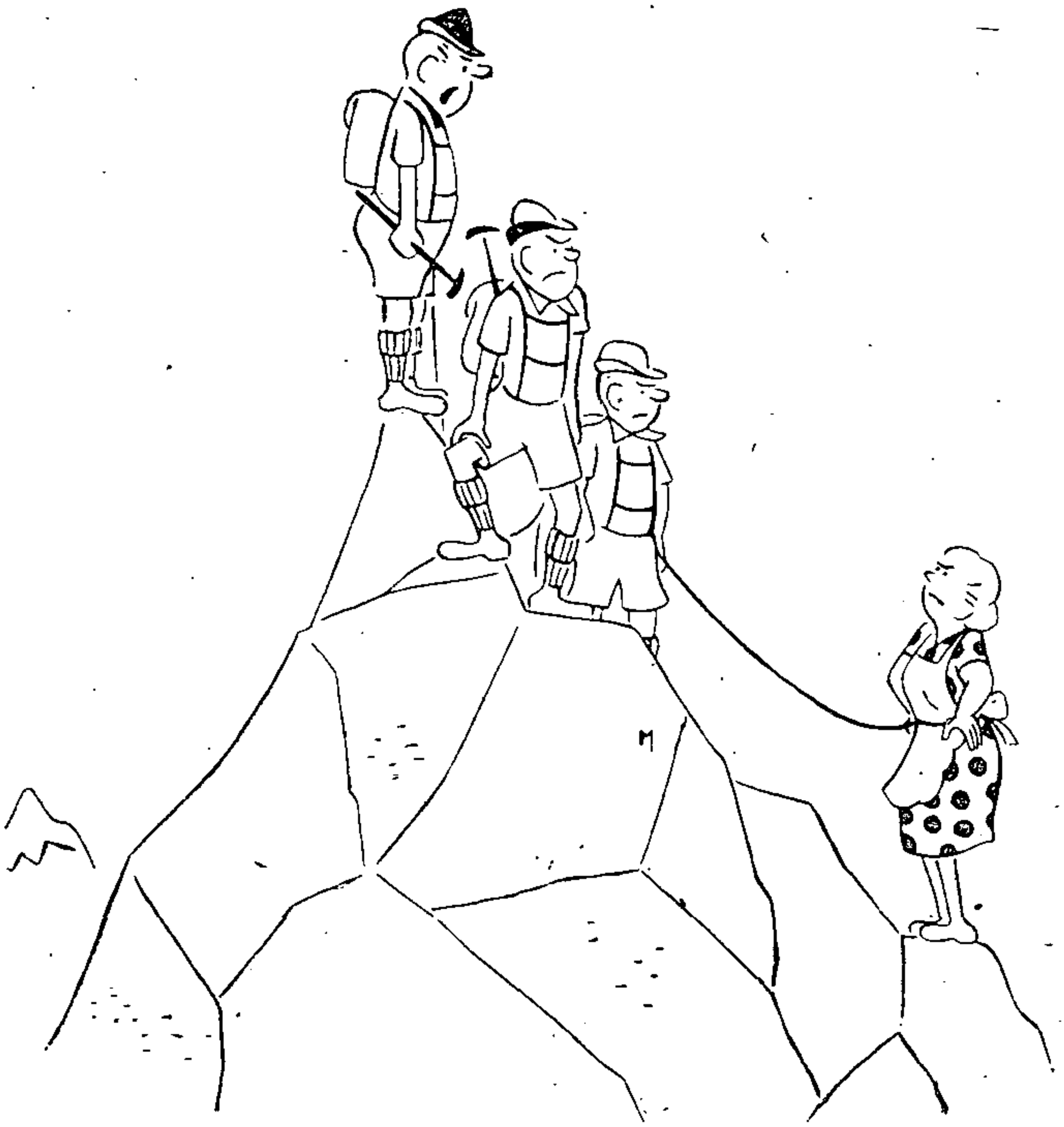
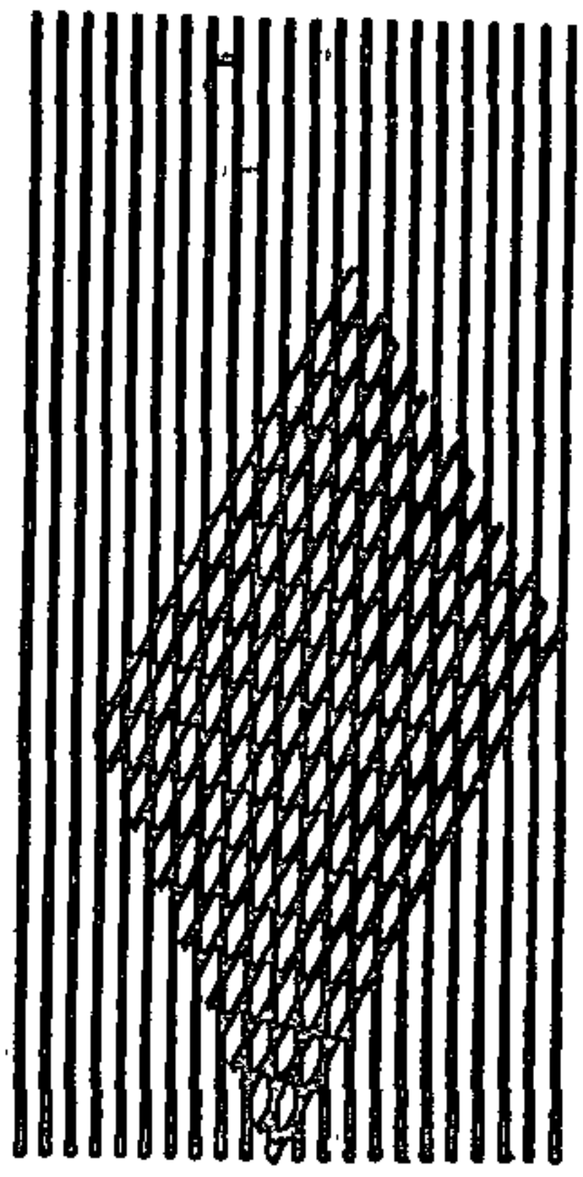


" Now will you believe we do nothing up here? "



Had the plan gone wrong? Had the body been found?

by JULIAN SYMONS

THE FOOL

MOST men, and women too, base their lives more or less consciously upon some system of ethics. It was the pride of George Mobey that he did nothing of the kind, that his life was ruled simply by his nose for women and his eye for the main chance. "I can smell," he would say, "believe me, I can *smell* when a woman's ready," and he had proved the truth of this by the number and variety of his conquests.

His eye for the main chance had also been demonstrated several times, in ways financially more satisfactory to him than to his partners in, for instance, the small bookmaking firm for which he had acted as debt-collector and the insurance firm in which he had been a high-pressure salesman; or to the old gentleman who had employed George as his secretary and rashly permitted him access to a cheque book. George had put a percentage of the collected debts and the insurance premiums into his own pocket, and with only a little practice, had been able to produce a very fair counterpart of the old gentleman's name on a cheque. Such activities meant that he could not stay in one place for very long, and George would have accepted (if he had known it) the philosophical idea that life itself implies movement, a permanent flux. He had been running for six years, ever since he came out of Borstal in his late teens, and nobody had caught up with him.

Something about the tone of the advertisement in the Worthing paper caught George's eye. *Gentleman requires temporary part-time secretary (male) to help with topographical*

work. He was not short of money, since the affair of the old gentleman had been quite recently concluded, but he was at something of a loose end and the advertisement had the air of not meaning quite what it said.

So it was that on a fine summer afternoon George rang the bell of the Villa Majorca, a small Edwardian red-brick house standing in quite extensive grounds of its own in the most solidly respectable part of staid West Worthing. It was his eye for the main chance that had led him to answer the advertisement, but as soon as he saw Genevieve Foster his nose came into play and told him that this was a peach so ripe that it would drop into his hand.

Not, of course, that he made any move at this first encounter. That would have been too crude for him, and a sense that there was something odd about the whole set-up also moved him to caution. He had half expected that Mr. Eversley Foster would be an elderly bachelor, as susceptible to his round-faced and rather consciously boyish charm as the old gentleman with the cheque book. At this interview, however, he didn't see Foster at all. He was round at Worthing Public Library where, his wife explained, he spent a good deal of time.

"Anyway, he left the interviewing to me," she explained. "He's just a fool about people. The last secretary he engaged could only type with two fingers. You *can* type, I suppose?"

George confirmed that he could both type and write shorthand. He answered her questions with the same briskness that she asked them, but he was distracted by the way in which the boldness of her dark eyes and the opulent sensuality of her body seemed to contradict her business-like manner. The opulence was of a kind now unfashionable, with distinct curves at breasts and buttocks and thick, powerful thighs. She was not exactly a beauty, but she had a cat-like quality of sexual attraction that drew him like a magnet.

When she asked for references he handed over, almost absent-mindedly, the letters he had typed on different machines and with different letter headings, and was shocked into attention when she tapped a letter purporting to be from Sir Chalmsley Baker of Redners Hall in Shropshire, and asked if he would mind if she followed it up.

George was not at a loss. "You can write, of course, but you won't get a reply for a week or two. Sir Chalmsley's yachting on the Riviera, lucky chap. He sent me a card."

"It's only a temporary job, after all." She tapped the letter

again with a fingernail, and smiled. "Really the object is to keep my husband occupied. He's got a weak heart and can't do anything active. He just doesn't know what to do with his time. We won't bother with these." In her smile as she handed back the letters he seemed to detect complicity, an unspoken compact made between them.

So it was arranged, and George went back, satisfied, to the small hotel in which he was staying. The work was only in the mornings for five days a week and the money was neither here nor there. It was the promise held out plainly by Genevieve Foster, and in some unanalysable way by the situation itself, that attracted him.

He presented himself, as he had been asked, at precisely ten-thirty on the following day, and began work.

Foster was a surprise. From the way in which Jenny—as he already called her in his mind—had talked, he had envisaged a retired Civil Servant, neat and finicky. After all, what other sort of person would be writing a topographical book because he had nothing else to do with his time? But Foster was not like that at all. He was a small man of about thirty, perhaps even a year or two younger than his wife, of a weak Byronic handsomeness. He had black hair with a single white streak in it. The two of them received him in the elegant drawing room, with its Victorian knick-knacks in Battersea enamel and porcelain lying around, and it was Jenny who did most of the talking, reminding him more than ever of a cat ready to lap up any number of saucers of cream. Then he went with Foster into a little study on the ground floor.

"Are you interested in topography?" Foster asked, abruptly.

"To be frank, I don't know the first thing about it." George added with his winning smile, "But I can learn."

"I took you on my wife's recommendation. She doesn't often make mistakes."

That more or less concluded their conversation. Foster then rattled off at considerable speed a variety of notes taken from the several large volumes on the table in front of him. They were all about the topography of West Sussex, and it seemed to George that the book must be in a fairly early stage of research. When he was typing some of the notes, he caught Foster looking at him in a way that was hard to define. It was as though the man were—what? Afraid of him, jealous of him, assessing him as a rival? Something of all these, perhaps, with something else that he could not define.

At ten minutes to one Jenny put her head round the study door and said, "Have you almost finished, Eversley?"

"For today, yes."

"You have time for a drink before you go, Mr. Mobey?"

They drank sherry in the drawing room, poured by Jenny into small, beautiful glasses, and it was she who showed him to the door. "I'm sorry not to ask you to lunch, but we have only a very light mid-day meal. In the afternoon Eversley has to lie down. I told you that he's not very strong?" Again as she opened the door there was that cat-like smile, suggesting complicity in some delicious secret.

The next day, Wednesday, followed the pattern of Tuesday —the dictation, the typing, the glass of sherry. It appeared to George that Foster was reading selected passages from reference books, and he suggested that if they were suitably marked in advance he could copy them without the need for dictation. Foster rejected the idea.

"No, that wouldn't do, that wouldn't do at all." He went on to explain that he took pieces from all over the place, and that it was important for them to be typed in a certain order. George looked at the man and saw that his hands were shaking.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I just thought it would save time."

Foster mastered himself with an effort. He even laughed. "I hope I didn't sound rude. I've had secretaries before who've done things their way and got everything into a terrible muddle. Doing them like this may take a little longer, but at least I can make sure that everything is in the right order."

On Thursday morning Jenny said, "Eversley's not here. He had to go up to London, to the British Museum, for some material he wanted. But he's left some things for you to type." As he followed her into the house she said casually, over her shoulder, "I'm making a cup of tea. Have one with me."

It was an opportunity, and one that might not recur. In the hall he put his arms round her from behind, holding the swelling breasts. Her body stayed taut for a moment, then she turned and her mouth was pressed to his. It was almost as though she were attacking him, and he was taken aback by her vehemence.

"Upstairs," she said in a whisper. "Upstairs."

He followed her into the bedroom, and here again she was a revelation to him. He had the sensation of being a passive rather than a dominant partner in what they did. The experience was strange to him, but he did not find it unpleasant.

Afterwards, while they sat and smoked, he took in the luxury with which the bedroom was furnished, the silky Chinese carpet, the enormous bed, the obvious expensiveness of it all. Surely there must be something profitable here for George?

"I know what you're thinking," Jenny said. "And I'll tell you the answer. Eversley's no good."

"I understand."

"Not in any way. He's no good to me, no good to himself. Eversley's stinking rich, it's why I married him. Oh, don't worry, he knows it, I told him. He still wanted to marry me. What I didn't know was that he'd get this heart trouble, and then that he'd want to moulder away here." Her tongue came out and licked her lips. "If we were married, you wouldn't want to work on a topographical history, would you?"

There was only one answer to that, and he made it. He said afterwards, "Eversley's a fool."

She licked her lips again, with the curious gesture she had, like that of a cat washing itself. "The trouble is, you haven't got any money. It's always the wrong people who have money."

He left her that day in a ferment of pleasure, with which there was blended some anxiety. He was conscious that for the first time in his life he had met a woman whom he might be prepared to regard as a partner, rather than as an object to be used.

On the following morning Foster was there again, and it was true that he had brought back some material from London, more books out of which he read passages.

At half-past eleven, however, he said: "Can you get along on your own for the rest of the morning, Mobey? There are some details about dates of afforestation that I want to look up at the library."

George intercepted a glance that momentarily startled him, because it appeared to be one of pure dislike. Then Foster smiled, and he thought that he must have been mistaken.

As soon as the front door closed, he opened the door of the study and started up the stairs. Jenny came down and took his hand. "Downstairs," she said. "We'll draw the curtains."

On the following Tuesday Foster went to London again, and by the time George left the house that day he was, as he acknowledged to himself, Jenny's willing slave. He had to leave before lunchtime, because after lunch a woman came in to clean up the house, and it would never do, as Jenny said

with one of her sidelong glances, for old Sarah to find them in bed together.

In a sexual sense he was her slave, but he was still George Mobey, he still had an eye for the main chance and he was convinced that Jenny had her eye on the main chance, too. He felt sure that she had a scheme in her mind about which she hesitated to speak to him, and he wanted to hear it.

In the end, before leaving that day, he spoke of it himself. "What's on your mind, Jenny?"

She rolled over and looked at him. "Keeping you happy."

"Besides that. There's something."

"Clever." She licked her lips and said cautiously, "I told you Eversley was no good. He bores me. He's a fool."

"He's a fool," he echoed happily.

"And we suit each other. Don't we?" He placed a hand on her thigh. She said suddenly, "Those references. You forged them, didn't you?" She laughed at the look on his face. "I don't mind. I'd just like to know."

He said boldly, trusting her as he had trusted nobody since he was a child, "Yes."

She moved off, as it seemed, at a tangent. "Eversley goes away on trips sometimes. On his own. For two or three weeks. He just wanders around."

"Yes," he said again. He couldn't understand what she was driving at.

"He doesn't leave an address."

"You mean," he said uncertainly, "I'd be able to see you more often?"

"It doesn't matter." She got up and spoke almost coldly. "You'll have to go now."

By the end of the second week, George was becoming restive. All work bored him, but this work was more boring than most, and at times it seemed to him that it bored Foster, too. Sometimes he would be there, sometimes he would leave material for typing, although in his absence comparatively little of it was done. There was a shock for George one morning, when the door was opened not by Jenny but by a dragonish old woman with a moustache. Foster was not there that day, but Jenny said coolly, "Sarah, this is Mr. Mobey who is doing some secretarial work for my husband." The moustached dragon nodded sourly, and for the whole of that morning he pounded away at the typewriter, without so much as seeing Jenny.

On the following day she explained that Sarah had come

unexpectedly in the morning instead of in the afternoon. Any doubt he might have felt about the strength of her feelings for him was dispelled when she said suddenly on this day, "Close your eyes."

He closed them obediently, and felt something pressed into his hand. She laughed at his expression.

"Open it. It's a present."

The present was a pair of orbicular black cuff-links, studded with what appeared to be diamonds, and a black tie-pin. George took them to a jeweller and was told that they were diamonds set in an opal, and that the tie-pin was a single opal. The jeweller valued them at two hundred pounds, although he was prepared to give only half that sum for them. George did not sell them, but the incident reminded him that it was time for him to turn his hand to another money-making venture. Was Jenny, after all, simply looking for a lover? And possibly a dómesticated one at that?

One morning she interrupted Foster when he was in the middle of dictation by saying she wanted a nail knocked in the wall. She ignored her husband, and asked George if he would do it. He took the hammer she gave him, and knocked the nail into the wall, but he could not forbear asking why Foster had not done it.

She whispered, with a faint giggle: "I told you he was useless, didn't I? He can't even knock a nail in a wall."

On that same day, when the three of them were having their glass of sherry before his departure, George looked at some photographs that stood on an occasional table near the window, and asked who they were.

"Aunt Edith and Uncle William," Jenny said. "And that's a family group."

"And this one?" He pointed to a portrait of an elderly, erect figure, with a small moustache.

"That's a cousin of mine. His name's Mortimer Lands."

There was a silence that was somehow awkward. He looked at Foster, and saw that the man had turned as white as milk. Why?

By the Friday of this second week George had made up his mind to have things out with Jenny. It might be that his eye for the main chance had deceived him, and if so, it was time to say a reluctant goodbye. If Foster was there in the morning, he would insist that she came round to his hotel later in the day. This was something that she had persistently refused

to do, just as she had warned him against coming anywhere near the house at a weekend. But Foster was not there, and before he could deliver what he thought of as his ultimatum, Jenny broke the news to him that the job was finished.

He goggled at her. "Finished? But all he's done is to make notes for the book."

"I know. I told you it was only a way of passing the time for him. He picks things up, then drops them. The truth is he doesn't like you, George." Her tongue came out, licked her lips. "I think he suspects."

"But this has happened before. You told me so yourself." And it was true that she had admitted to taking other lovers. He felt almost angry.

"I know. Eversley's a strange man, George. When it happens, seriously I mean, he goes away. He's going on Sunday."

"On Sunday!" He could not conceal his surprise. "Where to?"

"I told you, he doesn't say. I'm lucky if I get a couple of cards. He's talking about going abroad. He gives an affair like this time to burn itself out, as he calls it. Then he sends me a note to say he's coming back. Or I can go and join him if I want to. He's got the money, you see."

"Yes."

"Only this time it won't burn out. This time he doesn't have to come back."

He was surprised to find that his voice was hoarse. "What do you mean, Jenny?"

"He doesn't have to go."

And then the whole idea came out in a rush. Eversley and Jenny had a joint current account at the bank, and she could draw on it up to the limit of the money he kept there—about three or four thousand pounds. Of course that wouldn't last very long. But supposing Eversley decided to settle abroad, in the Argentine say, and supposing that he had signed a letter asking for his securities to be transferred to a bank out there? It would be quite easy out in the Argentine, where nobody knew Eversley Foster, to copy his signature, draw on the securities, and live in comfort for a long time.

He did not want to tell her of his own skill in forgery. He said simply that it might be possible to deceive an Argentine bank, but Foster's bank in England would be a much bigger problem.

"I've thought of that." She produced a sheet of their

headed writing paper, blank, but with *Eversley Foster* signed at the bottom of it. "I asked him to sign it because I wanted to write to the telephone people about a new extension. We just type a letter to the bank, and there's his signature at the bottom. I told you, he's a fool."

"And out in the Argentine I'd be Eversley Foster?"

"Naturally," she said coolly. "You go out as yourself, then we get a forged passport to make you Eversley. It's not so difficult, it just needs money."

Then came the question that could no longer be evaded. What happened to Eversley? George had no taste for violence.

"There won't be any violence."

He stared at her. "But then—"

"Eversley has a weak heart. I make him a night-cap every night. I've got some little capsules, and if I slip three of them in his drink he won't wake up." She smiled at him, and he wondered if one of her lovers had been a doctor. "I shan't need your help until afterwards, if that worries you. In disposing of him."

"Where?"

"The river, I think. I'd like to take him out to sea, but it's too difficult. Of course, he'll have to be properly weighted down. By the time he turns up, if he ever does, we shall be in Buenos Aires. And shall I tell you something?"

"What?"

"There's no extradition treaty between Britain and the Argentine."

Her coolness frightened him, and he wavered until she said that if he liked he could fly out to Buenos Aires first and wait for her. She would give him money for the flight.

"And what do I use to live on when I get there?"

She smiled. "You don't trust me very much, George, do you?"

It was true. She was the perfect sensual partner of his dreams, and in a way he wanted nothing more than to be with her, but he didn't trust her. He was rather proud of himself for not doing so—it showed that even when George Mobey met the most exciting woman he had known in his life he still retained his eye for the main chance. He tried to say something of this to her, and she nodded.

"I wouldn't want it any other way."

She agreed to draw two hundred and fifty pounds out of the bank, and have it ready for him on Sunday. She already

had the money he needed for his fare to Buenos Aires, and she gave it to him.

"This trust seems to work as a one-way operation. But you understand, you don't get the rest of the money unless you show me the air ticket."

Fortunately, George's passport was in order. He went up to London on Friday afternoon, and bought the ticket. Then he returned to Worthing and spent Saturday and Sunday in a fever of expectation.

In order to avoid the temptation of going near the Villa Majorca he went to Brighton to pick up a girl there. He picked one up on the pier easily enough, but after taking her dancing he ditched her—and this was not because there was anything wrong with the girl as such, as he admitted to himself; it was because Genevieve Foster was in a class apart from the other women he had known. The difference in their ages seemed quite unimportant. "She's got her hooks into you, George boy, you'd better watch out," he said as he stood himself dinner at the Metropole and reflected that very soon he would be rich like most of the people sitting round him, and would no longer feel an interloper among them.

The thing that gave him more pleasure than any other, he thought as, after drinking rather too much, he returned to his hotel, was that he *had* watched out, that in the stress of sexual passion George Mobey had still looked after Number One. If risks were to be taken, it was Jenny who would be taking them. No touch of concern for the fate of Eversley Foster ever moved him.

He walked up the quiet road in which the Villa Majorca stood at two minutes to ten on Sunday night. There was no light in the hall. Jenny opened the door before he could ring the bell. Even in the darkness he could see that her face was very pale.

"All right?" he whispered, and then he saw it on the floor of the hall. She had wrapped the body in a sheet, so that it was completely covered and tied it round with rope.

They carried the thing through the house out to the garage, without a word. The car boot was large and Foster had been a small man, but they had to double-up the legs to get him in. Or rather, she had to—it would have been beyond George.

Something occurred to him. "Weights?" he said.

"In the boot already." She opened the garage, and they drove away.

After they were out of Worthing she went down roads that were unknown to him, stopping after about a quarter of an hour when she pulled the car into a natural lay-by hidden among trees.

He looked round, bewildered.

She pointed to a hardly-visible path. "The river is through the wood, only a few yards. You can carry him."

The thought of contact with the horrible softness of the thing inside the sheet appalled him. He retched without vomiting. "I don't know if I can."

Her face showed nothing of what she felt. "I'll carry him. You bring the weights."

That was what they did. The distance was no more than thirty yards, to where a footbridge ran over a fast-flowing river. They attached the leaden weights she had brought at head and feet.

"Now, this you will have to help with," she said. They lifted the sheet-encased thing together and dropped it. There was a splash, and it disappeared. She rubbed her hands together as if she were washing them. "That's that. This sort of occasion doesn't suit you, does it, George?"

"I'm sorry." Now that the thing was gone, his confidence had returned. Back in the car he showed her the ticket, and said almost jauntily, "This is what you wanted to see."

"So it is." She took a packet out of her bag and handed it to him. "Twenty fives and the rest in ones. Nothing to stop you running out on me, is there, George?"

"You know I won't do that," he said, and meant it. He took a train up to London that night, spent the night at a hotel, and was at London Airport in good time for the flight to Buenos Aires. There the police, who had a watch on sea and air ports, detained him.

How had the plan gone wrong? George could think of only one thing—that the body had floated to the surface.

"You've found him, have you?" he asked.

The Detective-Inspector who was interrogating him said, "Don't kid me, son. We're talking about the murder of Mr. Foster. Eversley Foster."

Had they not found the body? If not, there must be a chance. "I don't know what you mean."

"And I don't know what *you* mean. Let's get this straight. You took a secretarial job with Mr. Foster, right?"

"Just for two weeks. It was finished."

"And then you're suddenly flying off to South America this morning. Why?"

"It's a free country. You're even free to leave it if your passport's in order, so I'm told."

"Where did you get the money for the fare?"

"I saved it."

"And what about this?" The Inspector waved the bundle of notes. "Don't tell me you saved these, because they're new notes, and we know Mr. Foster drew them out of the bank a couple of days ago."

"*Mr.* Foster?"

"That's what I said. And what about these—they belonged to him too."

He held up the orbicular cuff-links and tie-pin. George felt as if he were in a room the walls and ceiling of which were inexorably closing on him, but he did not realise fully the deceit that had been practised until the Inspector showed him the photograph of the man who had been found by Mrs. Foster on the drawing-room floor with his head battered in. This was Eversley Foster, husband of Genevieve. He was the elderly erect man with a moustache whose photograph George had seen on the occasional table in the drawing room.

Genevieve Foster made an excellent prosecution witness in the preliminary hearings at the Magistrate's Court. Sad, but composed and elegant, she told how her husband, who had been a director of a large banking consortium and had travelled up to London every weekday, had asked her to engage a temporary part-time secretary to type some material for the topographical history on which he was working. Mobey had seemed a pleasant and well-spoken young man, and it was not until the second week of his employment, when she had been going out with her husband in the evening, that he had been unable to find his diamond and opal cuff-links and tie-pin. She had been reluctant to believe that Mobey had stolen them, but her husband had insisted on a confrontation and had telephoned Mobey at his hotel, asking that he should come round on Sunday night.

"Eversley didn't want me to be there," she said. "He liked to keep anything unpleasant from me. So I went out and had dinner with a cousin who lives just outside Haywards Heath. When I got back—" Her voice faltered, and the magistrate was sympathetic. "—I rang the police at once."

Foster had been killed by several blows of a hammer, which

was beside the body. It was the hammer with which George had knocked the nail into the wall, and his fingerprints were found on it. The two hundred and fifty pounds had been drawn out by Foster because his wife had heavy cash expenses to meet in the following week, and it was the prosecution's case that George had stolen them after killing him.

Witherspoon, George's solicitor, abstained from cross-examination and reserved his defence. He was bewildered by his client's behaviour and was inclined to wonder at times whether George was mad. George told an extraordinary story about throwing a body into the Arun river and asked that it should be dragged. When Witherspoon asked what body it was, he lapsed into gloom. "It was a dummy, of course. I should have realised it at the time." In fact, some boys fishing on the bank did catch a dummy made from old clothes, with a bladder for a head. They threw away the clothes and played with the bladder.

Apart from this, George's only contribution to his own defence was a series of incoherent accusations about Mrs. Foster. At one point during the hearing he made violent signals to Witherspoon.

"Who's that?" He pointed with a shaking finger to a man who sat among the witnesses, a weakly handsome, Byronic young man, with black hair in which there was one white streak.

"That is Mrs. Foster's cousin, Mr. Mortimer Lands."

Witherspoon read with exasperation the note George handed down, which said: *The two of them conspired to murder him, I don't know which one used the hammer.* Witherspoon found himself disagreeing with the psychiatrists who had certified that George was perfectly sane. George was committed for trial.

Three days before the trial began, tragedy struck. Mrs. Foster was driving her cousin Mr. Lands from London back to the coast when she took a bend far too fast, swerved to avoid a big lorry that was directly in her path, lost control and ran into a tree. Both driver and passenger were killed instantly.

The tragedy had little effect upon the trial. Mrs. Foster's evidence, given in the Magistrate's Court, was permitted to be read to the jury after a legal wrangle. But in any case there were substantial facts that did not depend upon Mrs. Foster —the stolen cuff-links and tie-pin and the stolen money, the

fingerprints on the hammer and the flight to the Argentine. The accused was never able to explain them satisfactorily, and he did his case no good at all by persisting in a defence which suggested that Mrs. Foster had been his partner in a pretended plot to kill her cousin, who had been represented to him as her husband.

The judge, in his summing-up, referred in scathing terms to this defence as one which deliberately blackened the name of a dead woman on grounds for which there was no evidence beyond Mobey's unsupported word. "It is for you to decide, ladies and gentlemen, what that word is worth," the judge said. They decided within fifteen minutes. But the verdict of Guilty, and even the sentence of life imprisonment, angered George less than one phrase used by the judge in discussing his story: "Counsel did not put Mobey before you as a very intelligent young man. You may agree with him, but listening to Mobey's own account of the charade which he says utterly deceived him, you may well ask yourselves: 'Can any man have been as big a fool as that?'"

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MUSIC-MAKERS

J. S. BACH

Said Johann to his wife, "They may mock,
And declare that my music's baroque;
But when I am dead
They'll regret what they said
Behind Johann Sebastian's Bach."

C. DEBUSSY and G. BIZET

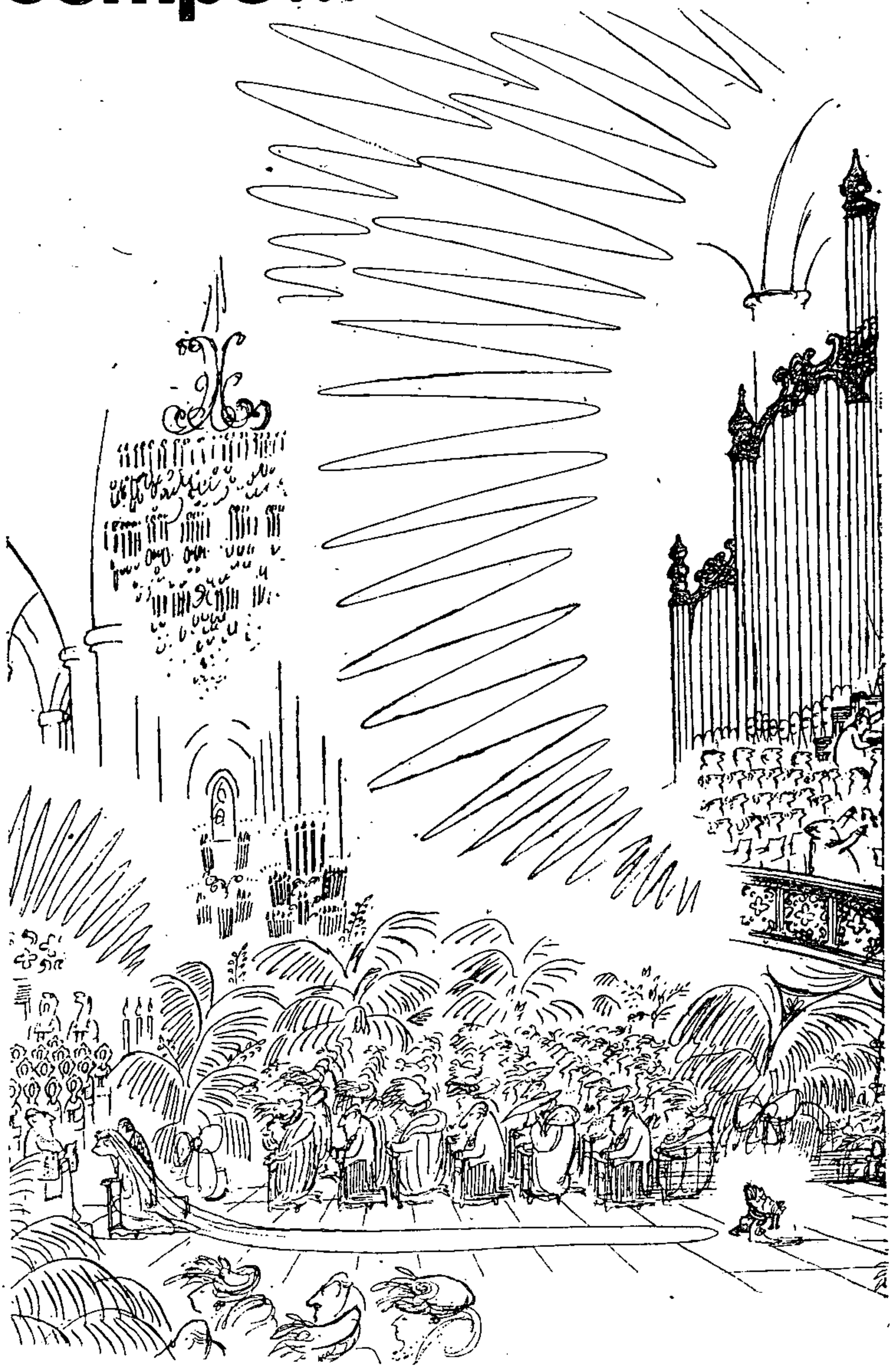
Said Debussy, "There's no way of knowing
Why incompetent music is growing;
Composing is izet,
But that fellow Bizet
Doesn't know if he's Carmen or going."

THE SCHUMANNS

Clara Schumann
Was no ordinary whumann—
Her husband Roberto
Wrote her a concerto.

IVOR C. F. TREBY

Sempé...



John Braine

A shrewd interview with a writer at the top . . . by STEPHEN MERRICK *and John Braine has the last word on page 74*

I DROVE up the steepest hill in Bingley, Yorkshire, to the posh part, almost at the top, to meet Joe Lampton, known to his wife and his neighbours and the world—and to himself —as John Braine. Author of *Room at the Top* and *Life at the Top*, novels which were true and honest in every word, yet deceived us all. Few people, even now, have understood the truth about Joe Lampton.

The world sees Joe Lampton as Joe sees himself and, indeed, as John Braine saw him. Ambitious, ruthless, anxiously greedy for money, position and power; with feelings which could be put away and a conscience that could be quietened. Joe says in *Room at the Top*: "What has happened to me is exactly what I willed to happen." The world believes him, he believes himself. But this was his biggest lie. That is why I came to drive up Bingley's steepest hill, almost to the top, to try to discover the real Joe Lampton.

Bingley. An ugly name for an ugly place. My gazeteer did not think much of it either. Three lines: *Pop. 22,000. Golf. A manufacturing town in the Aire valley with a moorland tract to the north.* It is no wonder so many people living in the Bingley valley want to escape to the hills around: to The Top, where I found John Braine.

I pushed at the doorbell of a house built of local stone; a house I could not clearly see because it was dusk and snowing; and snow makes darkness darker. It was not the house

you would expect Joe Lampton to live in, though it could have cost ten thousand pounds. But this was Joe's house, all right, at least in my view; though John Braine, of course, is entitled to his.

We sat in a room grand with books and the litter of toys and one-year-old Felicity, one of John Braine's three children, asleep in her pram. This house was home. Joe Lampton's home? Yes. Not the Joe Lampton we met in *Room at the Top*, but that wasn't the real Joe either. Yes, this gets complicated, so let's leave it while John Braine talks. But keep Joe in mind, he will crop up again; then, I think, we shall meet at last the real Joe.

I *did not* ask John Braine *many questions*. There was no need. He said: "The good writer is not articulate except when he has a pen in his hand." Then he turned out to be perhaps the most articulate writer I have met. With only a cigarette in his hand.

"The more articulate he is in speech, the less articulate he will be as a writer. There's nothing worse than appearing on TV for any writer. He can get too fond of his own voice, too articulate.

"If you find yourself articulate on TV, you may find yourself less and less inclined to do any writing, which is more difficult. There's no applause, no laughter; nobody is moved to tears."

John Braine is right in this. Good writers are normally not good talkers. There are exceptions and John Braine is one.

He talks slowly, yet his words come marching, impeccably disciplined, always in step; with almost no mannerisms except for ending perhaps every fourth sentence with "you see?" and a generous sprinkling of the word "generally."

Many people say, "I could write a book." They don't. They can't. They have neither the special talent nor the special temperament. They should kneel and give thanks. Writers, like other artists, are not happy people.

An American psychiatrist, Dr. Edmund Bergler, has studied the psychology of writers and he writes: "In twenty years I have seen a great deal of neurotics and the most depressed, pitiful and sordid lot has been that of writers. True, a few achieve fame and wealth, but the majority are poor, never achieve success, are always misunderstood . . . Yet the true writer takes all this in his stride, not knowing that he has chosen masochistically, because of his inner wish to suffer, a poverty-stricken

profession, in which he will achieve neither fame nor money, nor esteem."

John Braine does not see himself as suffering but there is suffering, sure enough, in this: "I have two sides to my nature. An obsessional side and a chaotic side. I'm very obsessional about certain things.

"If I have a thing with a bit missing I want to get rid of it at once, entirely; if it is less than perfect, I don't want it. It nearly drives me mad to have anything about the place not in one hundred per cent order. If I get a little dent in my car I don't want to drive it, it makes me ill to look at it.

"This sort of obsession applies to my writing. If I make just a small mistake in a page I find myself chucking away the whole page and writing it all again.

"Then there's the chaotic side, the urge to let every damn thing go. I want to lie on a sofa all day, reading; not even reading, just half asleep, half awake. I have to fight this side of me ferociously; in the same way I always do unpleasant things first, before I start writing. Things like jobs about the house, phone calls, carrying the rubbish out—I must do all these things so I can think of nothing else but work. I am getting to detest these dull jobs more and more.

"I write from nine-thirty to twelve o'clock, then from one-thirty to five o'clock, Monday to Friday. I can't always be depended on to do that. Sometimes I go into Bradford, ostensibly to get something I can't get in Bingley, but it is really to feel myself in the main stream, to see and hear people. Not to talk—that's not important. I would prefer to be invisible, there's nothing I'd like more.

"I am a slow writer and it generally takes me a year to work out a new novel, though of course I am doing other things, too. I can never start the day's work straight away. I have to spend sometimes an hour day-dreaming, just letting my mind wander.

"If I don't work my day's quota, I work at other times—late at night, generally. I keep intending to get up at six in the morning to do an hour's work, but this is futile. I'm finished before I start."

Every writer is interested in other writers' methods of working, hoping perhaps to learn some formula which will reduce creative writing to something short of agony. No writer will learn much from John Braine; his is the hard way:—

"I use small notebooks, pocket-size, for working out the synopsis and simply making notes. I take notes of everything.

I'm a hoarder. I work out the synopsis again and again and again and generally the finished story bears no resemblance.

"I use larger books, about six inches by four inches, for the first draft; and for the final draft I use the biggest I can get, more than a foot long. It's all handwritten, in pencil, though I've nothing against typing. It's what you're used to. I think it's a good thing to change your methods of working from time to time, because you shouldn't become dependent on any one way. I haven't yet changed my methods, so probably I'll soon start typing straight on to a typewriter.

"In the final draft I have to get really ruthless with myself. I cut down the day-dreaming time to twenty minutes and I walk up and down the room swearing and moaning, out loud —that's why I have to use an office in Bingley. People would think I'd gone dotty. I do 1,000 words a day and they need very little alteration at this stage, because all the real preparation has been done. There's still the final polishing and my wife and my publisher help with that, making sure the short man in chapter one hasn't suddenly become a tall man in chapter four."

John Braine had been talking a long time and I marvelled at the flow, the total lack of hesitancy; and I wondered at his certainty about almost all things; his hard opinions which allowed no argument or doubt. This could have been Joe Lampton, as the world sees him. The same honesty, for instance, as when I asked him if he enjoyed writing.

"I get a brief euphoria when I get the idea but never, never having begun something have I felt it was much good. I feel absolutely miserable. I feel I'm never going to finish.

"I feel I have no ideas and what I put down is rubbish. It's a case of wrenching every word out and even though it is rubbish you've still got to bring it out. In the end, I generally get to the stage where I know I've got the right consistency but then it's even harder to write, it really is hard, though it has got its own momentum.

"And don't think I'm being modest here. When I say rubbish, it really is the most frightful rubbish. I've just chucked sixty thousand words of my new novel *The Crying Game* into the wastepaper basket. Sometimes you take a wrong direction, you may have chosen the wrong characters, the wrong situation.

"Whenever I get gloomy I always imagine this is my first book. This keeps me going. If I let myself think, Can I do it again? I'd get frightened. So I don't worry about what I've

done in the past. I'm a new writer, just beginning. Start thinking of yourself in the middle and you get terribly depressed.

"The professional writer never does ask himself, 'Can I do it again?' any more than he would about making love. Writing is rather like making love when it's going well. Then it's possibly the purest sensation of ecstasy that you can ever know.

"I always remember the best moment of my life—when I finished *Room at the Top*. I remember thinking it didn't matter if I died, so long as I knew I'd get it published, and even if not, I'd done something, left something. I wouldn't want to live and die without leaving any trace; I don't want to go into oblivion, though sooner or later I shall."

He got up and walked about the room, restless, almost irritable. He said: "Yes, I am restless. I always have a period of being absolutely unsettled before getting down to a new novel, but this is different. When a writer gets to about forty—I'm forty-three—he generally passes through a stage of indecision. He asks himself: 'Where do I go from here?' Very often at this age a writer changes the place he lives in, or his country, or his religion, or sometimes he even changes his wife.

"I think it's better to change your thinking, to do something new. I'd like to do a play again, and write much bigger books with a broader scope. The chief fault with English novelists is they limit their scope too much; they're writing about England as it was forty years ago, not as it is today. Among my contemporaries, only Kingsley Amis ever has a try to look at things as they are.

"I'm getting very restless living in Bingley, too. But where to go, except abroad? I wouldn't fancy the Midlands. London is beginning to be out of the question. If I went to London I'd have to pay about twenty thousand pounds for a house like this; I'd have to take a job or saddle myself with a huge mortgage.

"Besides, living where you were born has advantages. You can have a good relationship with non-writers, because people knew you when you weren't a writer. I don't have to pretend to be anybody but what I am. I don't have to do what the intellectuals do and talk about the quaint old fishermen and the quaint old lorry drivers and the quaint old accountants, how *real* they are, how *good* they are, how *sincere*. And how guilty one feels. Well, I never feel guilty, except about

specific sins. True, I'm disgusted at being a human being, but not guilty. I don't have the guilt these progressives have.

"Lots of novelists have theories, things they believe in, want to push. No novelist should have theories, any more than politics. Above all, he shouldn't be Left-wing. A good novelist should be a reactionary, and something of a snob.

"He can at times have a feeling of noble indignation. It gives him a harmless kick. He should have enough snobbery to understand snobs, and not see them as people who aren't human. He must have a lot of greed and lust within him. People who are greedy and lustful are human beings, too. The novelist must have all the faults within him.

"Some novelists sign petitions for this and that. I don't. It wastes an awful lot of time and in the end the people hate you. Writers have done more for the Labour Party than any Labour politician. There has been no gratitude. The Labour Party has never done anything to make the lot of the writer easier. The Inland Revenue people hate writers with a really sick hatred. It goes to their stomachs if they see a writer."

It was getting dark, and we sat in the dark, and it was hard to tell if John Braine meant exactly what he was saying. I asked him why the good novelist had to be a reactionary.

"If he is not a reactionary he's going to fall into the trap of believing that man is perfectible and the world can be made better by political means. He's going to believe that the black man is always right, the white man always wrong; that persecuted people are always good. In fact, they're usually horrible, because suffering is bad for you.

"He's going to be entirely in error over absolute evil, finding himself for ever weeping over criminals, not knowing there are people who are bad and rotten and there's an end to it.

"Now it doesn't matter believing some wrong things. If I believe my car engine is driven by four little men, one in each cylinder, this doesn't harm me as a novelist. It might even do me good. But if I believe something that is absolutely wrong about human nature, that's terribly bad for me as a writer. The reactionary sees things truthfully and clearly and he is far less dangerous than the progressive, whose mushy beliefs always end in children's tears, in screaming, in agony."

John Braine went on, hunched on the settee, elbows on his knees, his face shadowed from the coppery glow of the electric fire and I still could not tell if he meant what he said or was mocking me.

On September 20, 1964, John Braine wrote this in a Sunday newspaper under the heading, WHY I'M FOR LABOUR. "Having been born and bred in the industrial north, there's never been any choice for me, politically. It's always been Socialism or nothing... and by nothing I mean complete political apathy, a complete and savage concentration upon my own material advancement..."

I did not remind him of this but I remembered it, as he went on to say to me: "Socialism is evil. As long as any country has real capitalists, with power, you will have freedom in that country, simply because they have money. They become above the state, the state cannot check them. Capitalism is the most splendid institution ever yet devised. I would rather have a fat, brutal, tyrannical millionaire than the most enlightened commissar."

A man may switch his views honestly, and get marks for flexibility. Or he may switch them because he has no real views, saying whatever comes into his head and seems effective. John Braine is probably a mixture or, perhaps more accurately, a confusion. He says a novelist must not have theories—then he advances theories. But I wonder if he means them; if there is not some other motive.

Remembering what he wrote in 1964, it would seem that the time has come for him to reject Socialism for his "complete and savage concentration upon my own advancement." And I think this is exactly what he wanted me to believe. He talked, for instance, a great deal about his income and income tax.

"I get more than the Prime Minister—more than £15,000. That's annual income, and it's going up, though I don't get an expense allowance, not being a Socialist. Most of this comes from my novels, from films, and about fifty per cent comes from abroad.

"If surtax were abolished I'd have no worries about money, about the time when I might not be as popular as I am now. But I may soon have to consider seriously leaving the country. This is a decision forced on every author who earns £5,000 a year; nobody gets above this in Britain, this is the frightening thing. You may as well get £6,000 as £60,000.

"I don't want to leave the country. After all it is my country, but taxation makes it impossible, unless you're very good at manipulating money. Socialists, prominent Socialists, are bloody good at it.

"Taxation, you see, has become insane. Anyone who can

leave this country, does. The people responsible for the present high taxation are either certifiably insane or treasonable, wanting to destroy the country."

Extreme views. I doubt if John Braine holds them all the time. He exaggerates, for effect, and admitted it. He said, talking of the artists' colonies in Cornwall: "There are no good artists in Cornwall." I objected that this seemed sweeping.

"I know," he said, seeming pleased. "That's the idea. If I said, 'There are a few good artists in Cornwall,' people would think there are dozens and the whole thing is weakened. But when I say there are *no* good artists in Cornwall they think, Well, there must be one or two. There are, of course—one or two."

Then I asked the question I had driven two hundred miles to ask: "How much of Joe Lampton is there in you?"

And John Braine answered straight away, with no doubts at all: "I should say as much as in you. There's something of him in everybody. I'm not as well organised as Joe. Here I am taxed to the hilt. If I were Joe I should have put my money to work for me. I'd be sitting pretty with £100,000 in solid cash.

"Everyone disapproves of me, but they still read me. Joe was important because he's quite honest. He was honestly ruthless and people understood that.

"We don't any of us, when it comes to it, behave as the progressives are supposed to behave, with their tormented consciences. We are far more like Joe inside. We'd rather be rich than poor. Whenever we see a nice-looking woman we want to go to bed with her. Whether we do or not is beside the point. Very often sexual morality is a question of opportunity. So the rich behave worse than the poor: they can afford opportunity."

John Braine is also honest, but perhaps he does not tell the truth about his writing. He may not know it.

The American psychiatrist who made the special study of writers, says this:

"The great naivety displayed by writers with regard to their own work is, at first glance, amazing. The last person to ask for conscious information about the psychology of a character in a novel or play is its creator . . . one could say that the writer does not read his own book with any noticeable understanding and it is useless to ask them for an interpretation of the unconscious motives of their characters. They either don't

understand what one is talking about or argue, with more or less irritation, on the level of consciousness."

I asked John Braine what made him write, and he said: "An urge to put the chaos in the world into some sort of order." I suggested it was more likely that he wrote in order to put his *own* chaotic world, his inner world, into some sort of order. And John Braine, showing no irritation whatever, said: "That's interesting, and probably true."

Here, perhaps, is the real Joe Lampton—not ruthless and ambitious, but driven, passively, by inner chaos, by the inner guilt we all have; driven ultimately, not to success, but to failure and suffering; driven, above all, to deny his inner knowledge that from his sort of conflict self-punishment is the only escape.

We all need to deny such inner knowledge and this perhaps is why the world sees Joe Lampton as Joe needed to see himself; perhaps as John Braine needed to see him: the young man who trod down women, and love, in his drive to The Top. Well, read the book again. And the sequel, *Life at the Top*. He did not drive to the Top—he was driven.

He trod down no women. They used him. Alice seduced Joe, remember, not Joe Alice. Joe gave up Alice on orders from Susan, and her father. He believed, sincerely, he had plotted his marriage to Susan, for money. Nonsense. He drifted into it, passively. Remember too, both Alice and Susan were unfaithful; Joe, on the whole, was not. And all his women had this in common: they were aggressive, nagging, demanding. Joe marries Susan, works for her father and finds himself dominated, rejected, humiliated. Thus his inner need was finally fulfilled.

John Braine, since I saw him, has written an angry letter to the *New Statesman*, protesting against a review of the new film *Life at the Top*: "Joe Lampton is not disappointed by riches and power but because he is not as rich and powerful as he expected to be. He wants a great pot of caviar, not a spoonful; a magnum of champagne, not a glass."

I wonder. Joe Lampton surely never was the greedy, money-loving slicker. He needed to think he was, to deny what he really was: a gentle man, grieving for innocence, designing his own crucifixion. He would rather have lain on a sofa all day, half waking, half sleeping. Like John Braine who, on his own admission, has to fight this passive side of himself—by writing. Naturally. Joe Lampton *is* John Braine, or part of him.

I am sure of this: John Braine is no more reactionary or money-loving than the rest of us; he is not as hard as he tried to make me think he was. His aggressive talk was so much soap bubbles. He says, "People disapprove of me . . ." because he cannot bear them to know he must have applause and affection, and reassurance, or his world shakes. No shame in this. All writers, all artists of all kinds, have these same desperate needs. Do you remember this from *Life at the Top*? "I sat down and pulled Barbara (his small daughter) on to my knee. I wasn't shielding her any more; she was shielding me. I didn't know what she was shielding me from; I only knew that as long as we could be so close together nothing really bad could happen to me."

Here is the real Joe Lampton. Here is the real John Braine. I know it, because I watched him with his own daughter; Frances, aged two, on his knee.

True, all this is theory, and John Braine may rightly disagree. But there are two things he cannot deny. First, if the theory is right, he is in the best of company. Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas—almost any writers you can think of were basically gentle people who needed to deny their gentleness.

Second, he cannot deny that *Room at the Top* owes its enormous success to the fact that it is psychologically true. People love this book, and Joe Lampton, not because he got to The Top but because they feel, even without knowing why they feel it, this was the last place he ever wanted to be.

The same people, I think, would love John Braine too, for the same reasons. But he would hate that.

John Braine *replies*

BINGLEY isn't ugly. The picture presented here has no relation whatever to the town I've lived in for the last ten years. To begin with, it isn't a manufacturing town but a market town which has become residential. There are a few mills and factories, mostly in the valley; they're built of local

stone and are far from being pretty, but at least they don't stridently quarrel with the landscape. I won't attempt a full description of Bingley, but simply ask you to look at it from the air. It's in the centre of a green bowl, with fields and woods on the sides of the bowl and the moors on the edges. From any vantage point in the main street the predominant colour is green. The country—not as tamed and manicured as Surrey, I admit—is on the doorstep. Either Mr. Merrick hasn't looked at Bingley properly or our definitions of ugliness are diametrically different.

Incidentally, Bingley has its share of genuinely rich people—genuinely rich because they've made capital gains. I don't begrudge them their money, but the difference between the rate of taxation for capital gains and for earned income always strikes me as being monstrously unjust. Why should I not object to this? I'll say it again: high taxation is, except in wartime, an unmitigated evil. The only effective and decent incentive is money. Reduce income tax and you can entirely eliminate the whole complex system of allowances and expenses and make rewards immediate and tangible. Instead of rewarding the best men with perquisites and blocks of shares, simply give them more money. Let them have enough for their expenses—travelling and so on—and if they can get by on less, allow them to keep the difference. All that is necessary to extricate this country from the mess it's in is to abolish surtax and to reduce the standard rate of income tax by at least two shillings.

That's enough about economics. Of course it's true that anyone who is in favour of our present exorbitant taxation is either a fool or a traitor; I should have added that many fools are highly intelligent and even patriotic. I don't trust myself to say what I think about those prominent Socialists who have become rich through capital gains, except that their passion for equality is obviously strictly platonic.

The fact that I've rejected Socialism—or rather the Labour Party's brand of Socialism—seems rather to shock Mr. Merrick. His trouble is that he sees politics as a way of life, a coherent philosophy offering all the right answers. I used to believe this; I used to accept what Burnham calls the liberal package-deal—abolition of capital punishment, the reformative treatment of the criminal, aid to underdeveloped countries, progressive taxation, legal abortion, and so on—until suddenly I realised that what I really wanted to do was to consider every issue on its own merits. I refuse to keep my conscience at

Transport House. I have exploited no-one, I have betrayed no-one, I have gained nothing material by changing my beliefs. Incidentally, I didn't say that capitalism always means ideal conditions for everybody; simply that wherever there is capitalism there is freedom or *the chance of freedom*. Happiness is another matter. This no political system can promise to provide—or rather *should* promise to provide. Socialism does, and this is my main objection to it.

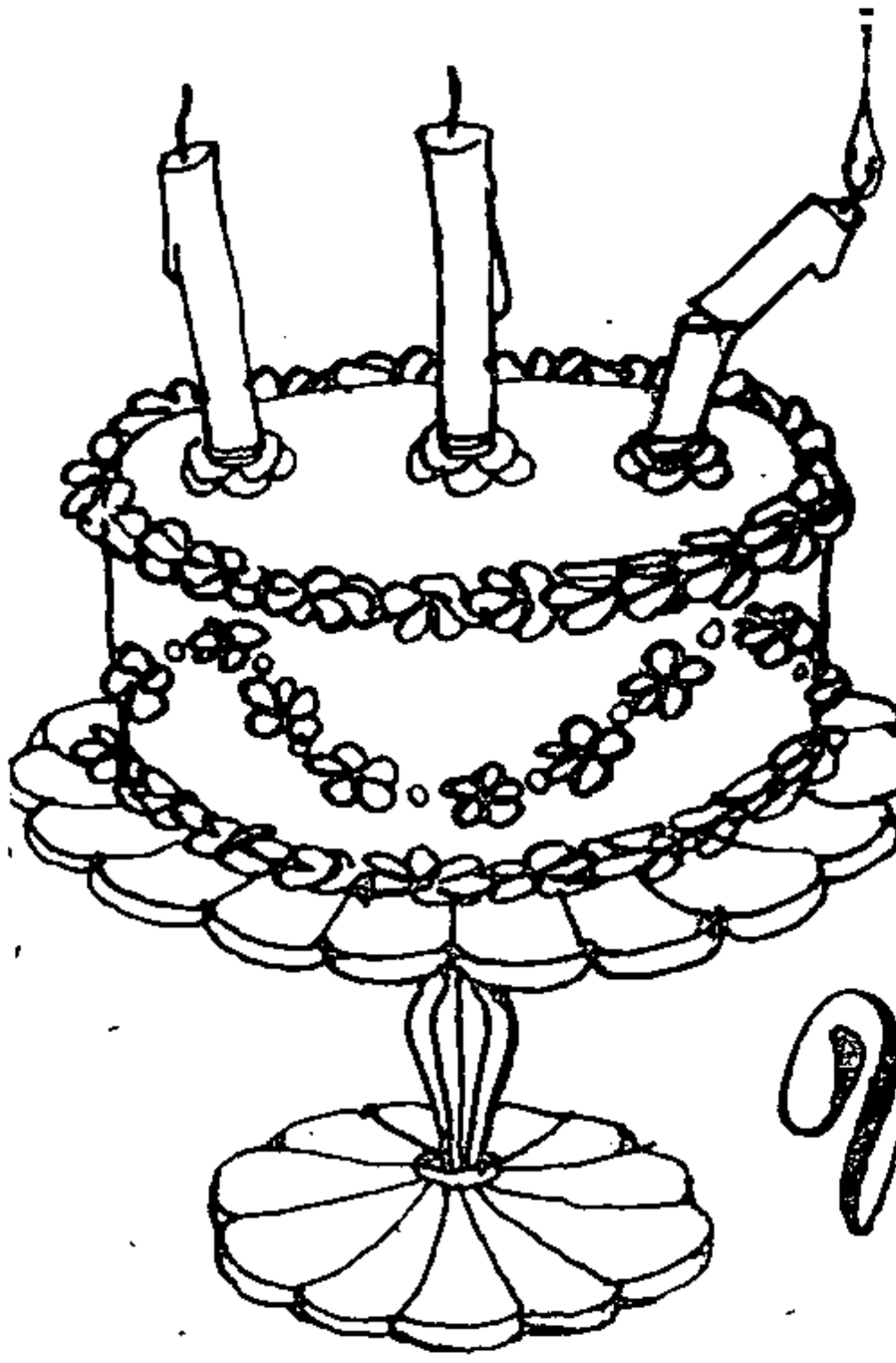
The rest of the article I can't really comment upon, because I don't know anything about John Braine personally. I fill in questionnaires about him from time to time, and I've even written his potted biography for *Twentieth Century Authors*. I reread his books about every two years with great enjoyment; when he has produced more, I shan't read anyone else. I think of him only as someone or something which produces novels. I have never been able to accept him as a real human being.

Dr. Bergler I do know something about, not having met him personally. He is highly intelligent; he obviously must have learned a great deal in theory and in practice, about psychology; and he wants to be a writer. By which he means a creative writer. Dr. Bergler has to admit it: a good poem, a good play, a good novel, can reveal aspects of being of which he, even he, knows nothing. Put it this way: Dr. Bergler is in darkness and suddenly a searchlight makes everything as bright as day. And behind the searchlight is a slack-mouthed fool. How has the idiot got the searchlight?

I haven't got a searchlight but I do have a small torch which throws a short but concentrated beam. I don't know how it works, but it is mine—my only possession, in fact—and I'm glad that I've got it. Dr. Bergler hasn't. I'm sure that he's tried to get one, that he's tried to write a novel, and I'm sure that the novel was a failure. Hence his book proving just how neurotic and stupid the creative writer is. But Bergler is still in the dark and the writer still has the light. Bergler will have to go back to the hard blue-green glare of the lights of the main road, but the searchlight penetrates the darkness out of reach of the road and even as far as the edge of the cliff and the sea.

I haven't the searchlight of a Balzac or a Tolstoy, and I have to walk slowly, since I can't see very far ahead. I may not even be able to go as great a distance as Bergler; he knows the main roads better than I do. But I can go to places where he never can go, and I am already nearer the edge of the cliff and the sea.

BY ALICE GLENDAY



Unhappy Returns

ON my maternal grandmother's thirty-second birthday—which was before my time—my grandfather, trying to pluck a rose for her as they strolled round the garden, got a thorn in his hand. He died of blood poisoning a week later.

On my mother's thirty-second birthday my father, stringing lights about the garden for a party to be held in her honour, came in contact with a live wire. Electric shock killed him instantly. Since I was barely three at the time, I don't know that I was as concerned at the loss of a father as at the failure of the coloured lights.

But I do know it was accepted as a foregone conclusion that the same fate would befall me—or, rather, my husband. For one thing, I was an only daughter, as were my mother and grandmother. For another, I bore their Christian name, Ainsley. How they could have been so enamoured of the name is beyond me. To give them their due, my parents couldn't have known that there was to be such a jinx on it. All I could do was vow that I would never burden my own daughter with such a name.

Nor have I. I have given her the proud name of Philippa—unaccountably shortened to Flip. My son, now eight years old to her six, bears the name Cornelius but is seldom called that. My husband, whose age I shall not divulge, is called Gavin and seldom anything else. It's not a favourite name

of mine, but since he had had it for many years before our meeting, I had no choice other than to accept it.

But I did try to put him straight about the fate that lay in store for him if he married me. Perhaps not forcibly enough, for at that stage—ten years ago—love was all. Gavin, who was a forthright person even in those days, smiled and said, "I'll marry you and be damned." I have sometimes suspected that he hasn't always smiled when recalling those words. Just as I have sometimes wondered if I could hold out till my thirty-second birthday.

But they have been happy years, on the whole—surprisingly happy, considering what hung over us. Not that we dwelt on it, for we were generally too busy coping with the present to worry about the future. But Grandmother, who never remarried and spent her remaining years crocheting doilies and sighing, never failed to greet me with a doleful shake of the head and a "Dear, dear, dear." And on her deathbed, after a period of unconsciousness, she rallied long enough to cry out, "Beware the Ides of March!"—a cryptic message Mother insisted was about me and my forthcoming tragedy.

Mother herself was anything but doleful. She was happily married for the third time—and she wasn't very fond of my husband. It seemed to give her pleasure to surmise how Gavin would be taken. Not, she was certain, in performing feats in the garden, for it just wasn't his style to pluck roses or string coloured lights.

Gavin didn't take kindly to any mention of his impending death. He dismissed the whole business as unmitigated nonsense. The deaths of my grandfather and father were sheer coincidence, he claimed, and wouldn't have happened if they'd had their minds on their work instead of on senseless gallantry. He even refused to take out more insurance, and forbade me and my mother to bring up the subject again.

So, as my fateful birthday drew near, I was forced to suffer in silence. I took every precaution against accident that I could think of, such as using nonskid floor polish and having the electrical wiring checked. I bought him a new pair of galoshes (which he never wore) and replaced the frayed door mat. I nagged the children about the danger of strewing toys on the floor till we all were in a state of nerves.

Except Gavin. He went blithely on, seemingly unaware of the pains I was taking on his behalf. Only once, when he caught me putting more feeling into my morning incantation, "Be careful in the traffic," did he tumble to what I was up to.

"Are you back on that tack again?" he said. "Come off it, I'm not going to kill myself to please anybody."

His assurance did nothing to reassure me. But I knew better than to pursue the subject. Put Gavin on his mettle and he'll kill himself trying to prove his point.

Even on my birthday morning I resisted waylaying him with a fond farewell as he hurtled out of the door. "Be careful—" I began, but he cut me off with a curt "Goodbye, I'm late."

The phone rang not long after the children had left for school. "Aillie?"

I sat down. "Yes, Mother."

"Is everything all right?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Happy birthday, dear."

"Thank you, Mother."

"I do hope everything will go off all right, dear."

"I'm sure it will, Mother."

"You know, dear, I've been thinking. I know Gavin isn't the easiest person and all that, but I do feel it's wrong to sit idly by and not lift a finger to help. After all, he's been a good father to your children."

"There's nothing wrong with Gavin, Mother."

"I know, dear, and that's why I say we should do everything we can to—circumflex fate. Just a minute, dear." There was a pause. "Your father says vent, dear."

"He's not my father, Mother."

"No, dear, but he's a very fine man and he knows what he's talking about. And you must remember that he was very kind to us while your father lay dying all those weeks . . ."

"That wasn't my father either, Mother. My father died when I was three—and in a matter of seconds."

"Yes, dear, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Accidents can happen when you least expect them. I was reading just the other day about a couple who went out to dinner—celebrating something, I wouldn't be surprised—and as the man was cutting his steak somebody bumped—"

"Oh, Mother," I said.

"All right, dear. I'm just trying to put you on your guard, that's all. But if you'd rather I didn't . . ."

"It's just that I'm a bit on edge today, Mother."

"I can see that, dear. But if the worst comes to the worst, just remember this—God didn't necessarily make us for just one man. There are lots of good men about, and—"

"There's somebody at the door, Mother."

."All right, dear. But just let me say this. Would you like me by your side? I know we haven't always seen eye to eye since you married Gavin, but I'm your mother, after all, and I'm perfectly ready to drop everything."

"No, Mother, I wouldn't dream of it. Look, I have to go."

"All right, dear. You go. But just remember—in spite of everything I'll be praying for you, hoping that the end—"

"Yes, all right, Mother. Thanks for calling. Goodbye."

I slammed down the receiver and picked up the cat and hurled him outside. Then I coaxed him back in and gave him a saucer of cream. While I was on the phone, ordering steak, he coughed it up on the hall rug.

The whole day was like that—messy. The vacuum cleaner, which I'd had checked in case Gavin decided to clean out the car, wouldn't work. And when I thought up an excuse to phone Gavin, I couldn't understand a word his secretary said. I thought it was just her prissy mouth, which she was always covering with her hand, but she finally got out that she had a toothache that was really most severe, but she didn't see how she could go to the dentist, since Mr. Martin was out.

"But he got there all right?" I insisted.

"Oh, yes," she said, aggrieved about something.

I lost my nerve about the steak halfway through the day, and instead planned a dinner that didn't require knives. I usually took Gavin out to dinner on my birthday, but it seemed safer to stay quietly at home this time. I'd considered asking a couple of friends in, but entertaining was suddenly fraught with danger—he might trip over a lamp flex while rearranging chairs or have a cigarette lighter blow up in his face. No, we'd have a cozy dinner for two—I'd give the children their dinner early—with no candles, no roses, no coloured lights.

And no Gavin. By six o'clock I was apprehensive; by seven, distinctly nervous; by eight, downright ill. When I got over that, a strange serenity took over. My whole life had been directed towards this moment. When they came to my door I would stand erect and ask, "Was it instant?"

Then it began to trouble me that they wouldn't know who he was. Did he carry any identification? Surely his driving licence... I had a vivid vision of our splendid new car, crumpled and dejected, strewn with the birthday flowers Gavin always bought me and for which I always got the bill.

Flowers. Perhaps he'd bought roses, just to prove... But no, that wouldn't have occurred to him. He'd just automatically get chrysanthemums—to which I was slightly allergic

—because my birthday was in the autumn. I had sometimes thought of dropping a hint to his secretary.

I took off the black hat I'd been trying for effect and went to the phone to call Gavin's secretary at her home. I had to wait while someone just as prissy summoned her. "Miss Priss —I mean, Miss Squires?"

"Yes, Mrs. Martin?" She still sounded aggrieved.

"I'm afraid Mr. Martin's had an accident, and I wondered—"

"Oh, dear."

"Now, keep calm, Miss Squires. It was only to be expected."

"But, oh, dear, not fatal?"

"Oh, it's bound to be, but I haven't heard yet. That's what I want you to help me with."

"Certainly, Mrs. Martin. You mean he's still—hovering?"

"Oh, I hope not, Miss Squires. But it's possible, of course —my grandfather did—so it's urgent I track him down."

"Track him down, Mrs. Martin?"

"Miss Squires, if you could possibly stop interrupting for a minute, we might get somewhere. Now, could you try to recall whether he left early to go to the flower shop?"

"Flower shop, Mrs. Martin?"

"Yes, Miss Squires. It's my birthday, you know."

"Oh. Many happy returns of the day, Mrs. Martin."

"Thank you. And if he did, whether he set out to walk?"

"But I wasn't there, Mrs. Martin. I left early myself—I had this toothache—and I checked that the only appointment left on his pad was for his Lions Club dinner."

"Dinner, Miss Priss?"

"Yes, madam. His monthly Lions Club dinner." She'd gone cold again, but I hardly noticed.

"I see," I said. "Just one more thing, Miss Squires—was there no note on his pad about my birthday?"

"Why, no, Mrs. Martin."

"His former secretary always made a note of it, Miss Squires. Goodnight, Miss Squires."

I was hurling hats back into the clothes cupboard when the phone rang. I knew it was Mother, but I finally answered it.

"What the hell's going on?" Gavin said. "Miss Squires just called me out from dinner and said you were in a flap."

"I wasn't in a flap," I said. "I simply assumed you'd been killed in an accident."

I listened to his breathing. I let him listen to mine.

"My God," he said. "It's your birthday."

"Drop dead," I said.

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William Sansom

LIKE

THE album lies before me. The old man in the shop sold it for a pound. But its value is untold, though we shall now try to tell something of it.

Dark green cloth binds it, its thick slotted leaves are a bat's-wing grey, like emery paper. Two words, POST CARDS, are lettered in dull silver in the artistic fashion of the time, a squared-up *art nouveau*. The cards that fill it provide a distillation of time past and nearly regained that I can find nowhere else, neither in old letters nor any other biographic data —except perhaps for very early phonograph records heard in a dark room with the right smells about— Pomatum of Peru and kettled turbot for Caruso, knife-polish powder for Kitchener.

All these cards have been used, all stamped and franked and as bright as today with their inked writing. They remain in every way more immediate than old letters. Letters are the product of serious gestation, and were enclosed carefully in envelopes. Their ink seems to fade more, they have the faded feeling. But postcards! These are the product of a moment's whim: or of very real urgency—for the message borne could not be carried

YESTERDAY

otherwise, in the time before telephones were in general use, and when working people worked such long hours there was little time to deliver words personally. In this album the people to whom the cards came must have been artisans or lower-class workers of some kind or another—what they were is never stated, and oddly, the absence of this information gives them greater rather than less immediate presence, as one may observe a stranger sitting opposite in a railway carriage and see him for what he is, without too much associative knowledge, and study him purely, and perhaps then provide your own speculations as to his part in life.

The cards date from 1910, in the first year of King George's time: the month, November: the day, the very first. That much is plain. But at what hours were they posted? In what weathers? In spite of what difficulties? Slipping out from what workshop? Or breathing what chill, bricky, early-morning air, with the wet-leaf pavements still dark? Or in bright modernised gaslight, by the frosted pub, while a polished black electric brougham slides by like a ghostly cabinet?

The first card shows, of all things, the Town Hall at Retford —though the postmark is of London. It is a well-coloured photograph, and might have been printed yesterday.

Behind the yellowish chateau-roofed building, a sky of turquoise glossily blazes. Old advertisements and shop-signs stare out to the side with a Roman solidity of plain line lettering, no pictures. Presiding in the tower above the empty square, the clock is arrested at twenty-four minutes to six. The square empty, then, on a butterfly-blue summer dawn? The photographer's figure, where my eyes now are, black-hooded, five-legged, alone in the Retford sunrise? Retford, indeed!

But on the other side of the card, humanity bustles away this buff and turquoise paean of municipal bliss. Blurred postmarks, a stamp, printed instructions and the maker's name—and scrawled with a brave urgency of black ink, the message and the address. Beneath the printed title POST CARD there is printed in doubly underscored capitals right across the card a ruling as formidable as a police-sign: THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE, it says. Were people, then, in the habit of writing addresses right across Retford Town Hall itself? With sharp pens which could pierce the difficult gloss? A postal mystery. And there, trying to solve it, is the profile of the late King, bald, bearded, framed in laurel and perforated, gazing stiffly at the ridiculous instruction, at this waste of printer's metal and ink. It is a halfpenny stamp, whitish green. Long parallel lines postmark it, together with the word London, and something like G ending upon the tip of his nose.

The card is unfrayed; its corners sharp: and there is another element, as I hold it, which adds to its immediacy—the presence of my own thumbs. I do not know my thumbs so well. Half-seen, they might be anybody's thumbs. In fact, thumbs are there, there in the presence of thumbs, it is thumby —just as if the original recipient of the card were holding it half a century ago. They would be feminine thumbs, though: but horny, soda-reddened. The card is addressed to a Miss A Haddie. The writing, in black ink, has still some of the shakiness of the school room, the letters joined with slow care, big curls to the capitals. It runs, it stares out:

Miss A Haddie
54 Jebb Street
Somers Town
NW

And the urgent message reads:

Dear Ada I will not get done till 7.30 Thurs The Wed orders keep me at it Can you come same time same place I will bring the you know what Yours Bert

Somers Town! Now nearly vanished as a name, like Portland Town. (Why do Kentish and Camden persist?) And Jebb Street? Would it have been a line of smallish houses of buff-grey London brick ornamented with plaster cornices, pediments on the lower windows, and patches of colour as different curtains show, a frost of lace on the dark windows crimsoned to each side by old velour? But no cream paint as now. Dark chocolate, muddy cherry, faded Prussian blue, laurel green, and the liverish yellow oak graining: colours to withstand the soot, all dull as the dirt they absorb. Varnish about, brass too—but mostly cheap black iron knockers. Though the steps shine out red-ochred or white as from six in the morning, chill-nose cleaning time with a sharp smell of kindling fire-wood from inside. Rotten-stone, winter-green, colza oil... scullery cupboards inside that smelled of things, Cellophane-free. And Miss Ada Haddie strangely volunteering above her sisters to clean the steps these days: and be first there for the postman: and news of the you-know-what.

Dear Ada I waited till 9 Thurs what was up working too hard I dont think Little Jack is poorly today, the fog gets him Please be outside Coles 7 Thurs The pants is ready Bert

This time the card is not coloured; it is a dull dark-grey and white representation of the main platform staircases at Liverpool Street Station. Plain notices selling coal, the usual enamelled announcements of Iron Jelloids and Stephens Ink; and a train waiting, and men in top-hats or caps waiting, waiting stiff as puppets at this long-ago moment of the camera's arrest. Could Bert have been a sly one, commenting on his own waiting? Unlikely. It was probably just a cheap quick postcard casually bought in the Somers Town area.

He signs it not "yours Bert," but plain cool "Bert," the man who expects an explanation. It is as if that tantalising reference to "the pants is ready" prophesies who shall wear them in the house that Bert and Ada might one day build. And how vital in a courtship are the little differences of address and farewell—Dear becoming My Dear becoming Dearest becoming Darling and always then for ever, My Dearest. So Yours differs to a point of hot excitation from Yours Ever: and With Love and With Fondest Love and

through all the tender gamut . . . But should we be peering thus into the records of a private courtship? Snooping among these papers whose presence in our hands was probably occasioned by death, by a household and a whole life being sold up?

The answer is yes, we should. A writer is a public detective, and it is his duty to detect. And since the reader reads the writer, he also is involved. A writer's duty—for instance, on assuming a room in a hotel—is to go straight to all the drawers to examine and ruminate upon any traces of the last occupant—hairpins, razor-blades, medicine bottles, cartons: and straight to all interconnecting keyholes to check up on life the other side of the wall. One of life's rules is: Never leave a writer alone in your house. He'll be in and out of your drawers in a trice.

But at least he does these things with sympathy—as one may feel sympathy for Bert kept waiting on that fruitless Thursday by Ada. On what cold brown November pavement did he stand waiting for her, the smell of horse-manure richer in the dark patches between the lamps' light, the dingy dull-coloured people passing? Seeing his own breath white against the night, throwing his arms wide and then across in that old cold cabby's way that seems to have vanished from our staid doll-like comportment nowadays, and stamping against the cold? If he hurried across the road to where frosted light blazed its warning of the demon drink, would he miss her during those two stolen minutes? Could he slip in to where a window dulled with mist showed pork-pies and cocoa? Or to the hole in the wall, the brown porcelain and iron urinal, with its little black bee so considerately figured three feet from the ground, its aiming bee, to keep your jet high and boot free? No, none of these—all would be too risky. Ada could not be expected to wait on the street at night, not even for a minute or two.

So he stood his ground, and stamped, and stared at the big overhanging blue lamp saying CHEMIST, and the occasional carriage or car lamp bringing a gilt glitter from the words BUTCHER AND GRAZIER, and listened to a mournful Irish song echoing away along the street, and waited, and watched at first with lively interest the drab street—his heart light with expectation—and then watching it all grow duller and duller, the lively frost of lace on windows looking more like dull grey newsprint, as cold and anxiety brought him closer into himself. And real fear for her, for life was rough and things could happen. Though this was offset by the greater authority of a

household, you could simply be kept at home—for if Mother said you must stay in for some reason, you stayed in, and that was that, and no way of getting a message through. Or did it occur to him that *he* was at fault? But the jocular "working too hard I don't think" hardly suggests a guilty pen.

What about Little Jack? And the fog, his cough? We cough today and we have new troubles: but there are instant suspicions of that time—malnutrition, thicker coal smoke, basement diphtheria. He must have been Bert's little brother.

And the pants? Another question-mark.

The next card, a gold-framed view of Regent Street, probably more expensive, turns the tables. For Bert does not turn up at Coles. Coles? A haberdashers? Plate-glass to the pavement, thinly bound in brass, artistic copperplate script fascia, the word "quality" everywhere?—for Ada! Bordered with gold Lincrusta, the oval illuminated scene of cabs and drays tinted in bright inks seems a strangely festive choice for the message. But, then, were these cards ever chosen with much care? It probably depended, as now, on the person. Some chose fussily, some did not. And who can tell about Bert—who may still, come to think of it, and supposing he was twenty years old fifty years ago, be alive.

Dear Ada Jack was so bad I had to stay by I saw Rog and told him to see you Coles and tell you but I havent seen him since and I hope he went because you will think I didn't go because you didnt come last time Im getting on with the dont-breathe-a-word I thought stars and a moon would go well see you Coles Thurs 7 Yours Bert

Followed fast by another card dated a day later, and this time bearing a view of the new Queen Victoria memorial shining white against the dark brown front of the old Buckingham Palace.

Dear Ada What luck Rog saw you Now he says you bridled about Lil here at the works well you should know Im not one for fun and games it was only a joke everyone knows what these girls are and I am only Yours Bert

The green-eyed monster! From whose thorny embrace Bert plucks the fine flower of a pretty signature—and at the same time comes out into the open as a suitor. Let us hope that Ada was out early on the ochred steps to greet the mufflered postman with his Austrian-army-style shako—her

sisters would have teased the straw-hat off her had they read Bert's little conceit.

And now, as if to dissipate the chill November weather and celebrate a happier note of reconciliation, we have a card (dated the following week) depicting the London boat arriving at the summery quays of Great Yarmouth. The white-fretted paddle wheel casings look suspiciously like wedding cakes: above the parasolled ladies in big hats and long skirts, and the yacht-capped and straw-hatted gentlemen, a bright orange sunset conflicts with parts of a blue Mediterranean sky. Accosting a purple-suited lady waiting in the right foreground is a little worm of a word in white letters, COPYRIGHT.

> *Dear Ada It was fine seeing you last night Your mum didn't harf put on a fine tea up to dick all right I got back finding Jack worse he worries us all stiff poor little chap I have done stars and moon What about a* black *top See you Sun Your Bert*

A turn for the better. Except for Jack. And "yours" has become the conclusive "your." But what did they have for tea? Fried faggots? Muffins? Dripping toast? Tea with the sting of an iron kettle in it? And by what light—not electric yet in Jebb Street? A white bright mantle in a frilled glass shade? Or an older blue and yellow fishtail jet? Possibly still oil?

There is many a house in a mean street in London today which has not yet had even gas put in, let alone "the electric." It is very possible that life in Jebb Street in 1910 was lived much after the fashion of half a century or more before. The old King may have passed on in May; but such capital time-marks change only the upper surfaces of life. The Haddies of Jebb Street would still have been content—they had little option in any case—to have eaten their tea by the kitchen range to the living slow glow of an oil-lamp and its rich companionable smell (sickly to enter upon, loathsome to leave), and occasionally a smut sent up to float across the warm kitchen air like a single air-bound musical note. Let us hope it was there among the glinting of chipped china and warmth of cloth, with the clothes-rack well strapped to the ceiling—and not in the pallid front parlour stinking of its upright walnut piano.

Smells of rough soap and the clothy smell of the copper; of coal and brass-cleaner; of apples and a good cake baking and a whiff of drains—just as upstairs in bedridden old Granny Haddie's room a touch of lavender essence on a hot coal

shovel mixes with and overcomes the bedpan smell. All these mixed smells making this a human house indeed; and a house furnished, moreover, with pieces of most elegant design, a paradoxical result of the Haddie's comparative poverty. For they had been able to buy nothing first-hand. Nor even second-hand heavy mid-Victorian furniture. They had to be content with older unfashionable early Victorian pieces, plus a few Regency survivals thrown in. And all this contemptible treasure was well-kept by people who made at home their own polishes, and knew, before the present era of package-fed handless men, the simple chemistry of house-keeping—what things were made of and how best to treat them. The Haddie furniture would make a profit for a modern antique shop.

When we read of such a year as 1910, we tend to find only the latest reach of progress—the growing amount of motor-cars, telephones, phonographs. These were recorded precisely because of their novelty; they were still the exception to rules obtaining from fifty years before. You could still always run out with a shovel and be sure of manure for the garden. Pale-painted rooms of the *art nouveau* were for those with the money. Only the expendable small matters changed easily, foods and manners of eating and entertainment—cocoa had arrived in tins; and night life, as always, was cleaner in some ways and dirtier in others; yet—very important—it was easier and cheaper to travel about, people *went* more.

But Bert? How was he on that evening of the tea? Cocky as his written words? Or on some kind of stiff and scrubbed best behaviour for Mum and the family? And what was his trade—a bottler of Rowland's Macassar Oil, enemy thus of Mum's antimacassars? A trimmer of "Automatic" silent sewing machines? Impossible to tell, though from evidence I shall come to later, one may form certain suspicions. Nothing, of course, is known of his appearance. Hair parted in the middle? Or a cow-lick on the forehead? But I do know what Ada looked like—later on in the album there is a photo-graph of her, showing a delicate egg-shaped face with a small pointed chin, kind little eyes so undefined as suggest a hazel colouring and sandy lashes and a light smudge of freckling. A humorous mouth whose unpainted lips have little shape to them but a slight downwards twist, as if, while ready to laugh, she might quickly be dispirited. Adding up, altogether, to a fragility matched by a fleece of brown hair clouded and wispy —a small-boned girl both wistful and yet somehow strong, one who dared but not too much.

Now the next card—certainly chosen to be a sober one, a brown throw-out, a local view of a drab road by King's Cross with only an old raised-poop coal-cart in view. This card was never stamped. It must have been sent in an envelope. One may know why.

My dearest Ada How can such happy days be sad Little Jack is fading fast His throat is so bad he cannot find breath even with the tube You were wonderful Sunday, all I have ever dreamed of all my life my dear I will try Thurs depending on J Your loving Bert

Then, there is a gap.

November passes. And so, it sadly seems, does poor little Jacko. He died. Drains, diphtheria . . . in a shabby room in a shabby brown street far from the coloured world of great brass-bound Rolls-Royces, Vesta Tilley, Clarice Mayne . . . no, the last long days of his illness looked out through greyish lace past the fern in its chipped green pot on to a dull green-painted window-sill and, beyond, the brown terrace façade across the road. Chimneys, wet grey slates, and the brick walls enlivened by no poster pictures but solid lettering announcements in paint. And how brown the grey pavements looked—a pigment of brown in the stone, a scum of brown boot-earth on it. And railings—railings, railings, railings, the uprooting of the last war, when we tore up our railings to hurl at the enemy, makes us forget how houses everywhere were barred with railings, painted iron railings on all sides and windows to keep out the rough and the tough fustian figure starved in a rookery, beered up in the glassy gin palace.

And drabber clothes passing at a slower pace on these browner streets. If the women wore more cloth and larger hats, their colour was never so striking as now, not in Jack's street, where clothes had to wear well. Hoops, horses, street music—when we can turn music on with a tap, music was then a precious commodity only obtainable from the presence of a musician. The German Band, the Italian harpist, the penny-whistler were *welcome*: those who paid them sixpence to go away to another street were the few. Nor did the horses all merrily clip-clop—much more the slow beat of a dragging heavy-hoofed dray, the drawn creak of slow wheels as the sound of time was slowly pulled along through a brown day full of lasting minutes. From all of which a whistling brightness of human spirit could rise to offset the workaday hours.

Could rise, did not always. Then, the kitchen sink was indeed the kitchen sink. Hours of yellow soap and wooden draining board, to the boil of dishcloths—and no light music to colour the wash, you sang yourself; there was the heartening old habit of singing while you worked. Time was real—as these post-cards show, written from week to week, not a telephoned day to day, each a cardboard memorial to the lack of free time and free communication. You could send a sixpenny telegram, though, if you had sixpence.

There must have been a funeral for Jack. And with the funeral, a pause. But little Jack would not have merited a Black Ascot, life at Bert's level went plainly on: and indeed, a fortnight later, a further card arrives.

Again, a strange choice of picture—no mourner would consciously have selected a fuzzy photograph in burnt sienna and bright bice green of a chine somewhere, a place of rocky ferns and rustic wooden rails, with a thatched summer house and an umbrage of darker trees overhanging all. The name of the chine has been worn away by someone's thumb. Why? Was this card more looked at than others? Did some child play with it—the momentary touch of a child destroying a half-century's care? Or was the message on the back especially treasured?

> *Dear Ada Ill be at Coles Thurs 7 I give the world to be at your side I got the top ready now in blue not having the heart now for black All my love Bert*

And this was not enclosed in an envelope! There lay love in the open for all to see!

In that long-ago time of curly bowlers and Parma violets, of barrel-organs and chars-à-bancs, of senna-pods grinning like green false teeth in the night-glass—there was love, and they were perhaps more romantic about it than we are. It is thus not wrong to be romantic about such past days—because those who lived then felt, when it suited them, most romantic. You simply have to assimilate, take the sweat-shop and the honeysuckle at the same time: and in the proportion of *their* sense of time passing, not ours. Include both, leave neither out. And never forget the doom of the first decade of the century: whenever envy rises to pine for the upper reaches of these times, for the parasolled punt, champagne and song, Gatti's, Romano's, the whole giant pink strawberry of an Edwardian summer—do not let us forget that it all ended in mud, the white-flannelled young gods died early in the mud,

just as the red coats of the soldiers in the park dulled to khaki reddened only by their own blood, and their nursemaids disappeared into factories for ever. Old Mrs. Haddie upstairs with her lavender shovel and bedpan was the lucky one: to live long in Victoria's reign and die of old age shortly before 1914—that was the right recipe.

And what happened to Bert and Ada? For after November, 1910, the passage of postcards stops.

Only one further clue: a photographed card, unused, of a girl in fancy dress. She wears a curious outfit upon which suns and stars and moons blaze. She wears trousers. Beneath her, in white and carefully scripted letters put in by the photographer, a caption states: MADAM UNIVERSE. It is of course, Ada. And that was what Bert was up to with his you-know-what—the secret construction of a fancy-dress. Was he then a tailor? Or, after all, a hand at the "Automatic" silent sewing machine works, borrowing one after hours? No—for why should Wednesday's orders have been so pressing, who should order so many sewing machines on a Wednesday?

Thereafter, the album is full of other postcards, all addressed to a Mrs. A Kendal, but still to the old Jebb Street address. They are mostly holiday postcards from a number of English resorts, with simple news of the weather and pleasant times enjoyed. Later on, there is a birthday card, yellow roses on an embossed silver horseshoe, from a child. The message is scrawled in capital letters, a very early and obviously guided attempt to write, saying simply, DEAR MUM with so many Xs following, that there is no room for a name.

But who was Dad? Was it Bert?

Their communication certainly came to a stop. But possibly only the urgency came to a stop, the urgency and the very formality of postcards. For perhaps from then on Bert was accepted, there was a situation between them, and he could just come along himself and knock on the door. But perhaps, too, the half dozen cards were kept not, after all, as the record of a courtship—but of a fancy-dress! Perhaps Mrs. Kendal treasured the memory of her first fancy-dress dance—where, after the nameless Albert had taken all that trouble to construct it for her, she met, and was swept off her feet by, the shapely figure of the amorphous Mr. Kendal? Perhaps . . . perhaps . . . certainly there is nothing to be deducted from the initial A in Mrs. A Kendal. Her name was Ada. People often continue to address a woman so, and not by the husband's initial.

All we know is that she got married, and had a child.

Looking into the past is like looking at a room in a mirror: everything is a little darker, yet a little too clear where the light shines, and within all there is the mystery of what is happening just beyond the mirror frame, for the whole room is never revealed, and behind the mirror in that mysterious other room there looms an imminence of movement, somebody or something is about to move in, yet hesitates, will never be seen.

The holiday cards—from Scarborough and Clacton and Felixstowe and Buxton—send their love to Dad, and as time goes on to the baby, Sophie and sometimes Sofie. They are amusing in their fussiness about the weather—" it rained yesterday, but we all went on the sands today ": and about the journey, " we had a good journey down, empty carriage to Doncaster ": and a jocularity " did you think the PO's on strike not hearing we'll be like niggers I hear you say well it's been rain, rain, rain every day." All with a note of guilt to them, as people speaking of what happened a week ago will say that it occurred on " the Wednesday," no on " the Thursday," wait a minute was it " the Wednesday " though? Speaking to you, yet addressing inwardly some accusatory Judge of the Truth.

Yet beneath these breaths of human air, and the ornate old pictures of Kursaal and Parade, there is a tragic momentum. For, as one may have suspected, the last cards are dated July, 1914. The new King's head, thinner and more meagre than Edward's, adds its pathetic note.

But here again a question arises, no tale is ever quite so parcelled off—for the album itself is almost filled up at this point, with two spaces to spare. It is possible Mrs. Kendal bought another album, and simply could not resist the neat new slots.

Just as I could not resist going along to Somers Town and to have a look at Jebb Street. There it was still, a row of narrow Victorian-built three-storey houses, grey brick with splashes of plaster, many of them now painted cream in place of the former dull browns and greens and crimson lake. Thus not quite as it was, but very nearly: come down in the world a bit; many railings uprooted, but some left; lace curtains still, and sometimes even a bedspread strung up on rings to make do for a curtain; yet—television aerials.

But where No. 54 was, empty air . . .

Poor 54, along with its next-door neighbour, gone a week before under the picks and 'dozers of a demolition company.

Surviving two wars, and a decade and a half of peace. Now gone.

I stood there by the cleaned ground, from where most of the rubble had been cleared away for ever: stood before a neat cut-out of air, a silhouette of sharp nothingness with the relative indistinction of real bricks to either side. It was like the cut of a bomb—with one difference, that bombs are untidy and leave wallpapers and fireplaces and even coats on hangers high up on walls from which the floors had disappeared. At least a bomb leaves some small evidence of the human inhabitant: but the demolitioners are clean, savagely clean—showing one of the true badges of humanity, which is too often a place well-scrubbed of everything human. Thus, not a single sign of anyone having ever lived there. In these few cubic yards of space, time had vanished.

Where were all the poor brass knobs that Ada's hand had turned, the blackleaded grates and the patches of tile? Where the copper, the coke-crusher, the early lavatory bowl and its good iron cistern? That house was full of such machines—who now hears of the dusty long-armed cellar-crusher for large coke?—and I thought of the windows with their thin iron screw-arms for opening the top fan-lights and the brass-curtain rods for inner lace and the outer curtain brackets for the plush curtains and the slate-dark blind with its acorn puller and all the other strings attached, each square of glass so heavily rigged it became less a window than a windjammer. Now, all gone.

Gone along with the more obvious things, the furniture, the trunks of the last clothes, and of course this that suddenly turned up in a junk-shop two miles away, the postcard album, the urgent living evidence that Ada, at least once upon a time, knew Bert.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (MAY ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Ruling the roast.* 9, *Unguent.* 10, *In tears.* 11, *Arum.* 12, *Band of Hope.* 14, *Bolshy.* 16, *Ferryman.* 19, *Dribbler.* 21, *Fencer.* 25, *Astrologer.* 26, *Stud.* 28, *Nankeen.* 29, *Abridge.* 30, *Mephistopheles.*

Down. 1, *Rhubarb.* 2, *Leg-pull.* 3, *Noes.* 4, *Titian.* 5, *Evil-doer.* 6, *Out of order.* 7, *Sea-room.* 8, *Astern.* 13, *Shibboleth.* 15, *Oar.* 17, *Ale.* 18, *Heroines.* 19, *Drains.* 20, *Intense.* 22, *Citadel.* 23, *Redress.* 24, *Legato.* 27, *Arch.*

The room went black. All was silent—and then, a board creaked . . . by HUGH B. CAVE

Footsteps

CARMODY did not hear the broadcast. He was in bed with pen and notebook, listening to his tape-recorder and trying to catch the wording of *Chi Chi Bud-O*. The trouble with Jamaican folk songs was that people in different parts of the island sang them differently, and some of the patois was all but unintelligible.

He had been collecting folk songs in Jamaica now for nearly a year, but these last half-dozen tapes were giving him trouble.

His housekeeper did hear the broadcast, however. There was a radio in the kitchen where she was preparing his supper. When she came bursting into his room with a paring knife clutched in one hand, Carmody knew something was wrong.

He put his notebook down and frowned at her. "What is it, Mrs. Sheppard?"

"Him did escape, suh!"

"Who has escaped?"

"That Jargie! It was on the radio. Mr. Carmody, him will come straight here to kill you!"

Carmody silenced the recorder on the table beside his bed and looked at her.

"You're sure?" he demanded, then waved a hand impatiently to silence her babbling answer. "Did they say on the radio *when* he escaped?"

"Last night." Her face was grey with terror. "Him could be here *now*!"

"In this rain?"

"No rain can stop that man!" she wailed.

With an effort, Carmody twisted himself on the bed to

frown at the room's only window. Through the mist on its bubbly glass he could see water cascading from the edge of the moss-covered roof above. The downpour, at this time of year, was likely to continue for days. He knew without asking that the dirt road to the village was washed out; that he could not get there even if he were able to drive. He knew, too, that on a night like this he could not expect the local police to walk three miles to look in on him.

But the housekeeper was right. Jargie would come. Jargie had sworn to get even.

It went back to a day two months ago when Jargie's girl, pretty Gladlyn Henderson, had been found with her throat cut. The whole district knew that Jargie had threatened to "chop" her for paying attention to other men, but no-one had said so to the police. They feared Jargie even more than they hated him. Those enormous hands of his had crippled every man who had dared to stand up to him.

But he, John Carmody, *had* gone to the police. The murdered girl had been his housekeeper. He had told them of Jargie's threats and the girl's terror, and his report had led to their discovery of blood under the handle of Jargie's machete. In Kingston, the CID had proved that the blood was Gladlyn Henderson's. Giant Jargie, swearing vengeance, had been tried, found guilty and dragged off to prison to face a hanging.

Now he was at large. Coming here. Carmody threw aside the bedclothes and sat upright.

"Crutches," he said, and old Mrs. Sheppard handed them to him. He could not walk much even with the crutches, but it seemed important now to show the old woman he was able to. He hobbled across the room to his typewriter and rolled a sheet of paper into the machine.

He was rusty. He hadn't used the typewriter since smashing his knee in a fall from a horse, the week after Jargie's conviction. He managed a short note, signed it and sealed it in an envelope.

He handed the envelope to Mrs. Sheppard. "Take this to the village police station."

She mumbled something about his supper.

"I can look after myself," he said. "Go on now, before the road gets any worse. I'm asking the corporal to send one of his men here to spend the night. You can come back with him."

She went out of the room shaking her head, and a moment

later he heard the front door close. It was already dark outside. Would she follow instructions? Probably not. They hated the rain, these people, and most of them were afraid of the dark. She would go home, he supposed, and when she came in the morning she would tell him she had tried to reach the village but the road was flooded. Anyway, it would get her out of the house.

Struggling to his feet again, he hobbled on crutches to the front door and locked it, then went down the long, gloomy hall to the kitchen. His supper was on the oil stove. He turned the stove off, ate something and carried the coffee pot back to his room, spilling some at every bump of the crutches. This place, Glentully, had once been a coffee plantation—a big one for Jamaica. That explained the hugeness of the house, which had nineteen rooms and a maze of corridors on its two levels.

He was out of breath now. He had to sit on the edge of the bed and rest. As he did so, the light over his head suddenly dimmed. He looked up in panic. Electricity here was supplied by a turbine at the river. Sometimes in a hard rain the intake silted up, or was choked with leaves. If that happened tonight...

The light brightened again. He expelled his pent-up breath in a gust of relief.

Now then, the tapes. There was almost no chance that they would work, but he must use what weapons he had. He dragged himself across the room to the pile on the table, found the one he wanted, and carried it back to the machine by the bed. If the power went off, the recorder, on batteries, would still work, at least.

He fixed a reel in place and turned the machine on to be sure the tape was threaded properly; listened for a few seconds; shut it off again. Then he made himself comfortable on the bed, stared at the open door and waited. It was no use closing the door. It had no lock.

Nineteen rooms. All of them had windows, but half the sash-locks were rusted away or broken. How many doors were there in the house? Nine or ten, at least. A determined push would open almost any of them.

He had no gun, of course. Had never used a gun in his life. Or a machete, either. Jargie would have a machete. All the mountain people had them, and kept them razor-sharp with little triangular files. With such a weapon a powerful man could lop a victim's head off at one stroke.

What was that?

A thud, downstairs. He sat up, wincing as the sudden movement brought a stab of pain. His right hand went slowly to the recorder and turned the knob that started the motor. The box responded with a low hum. He felt for the push-button marked PLAY, but he did not press it.

It wasn't time—not yet.

The thud again. A door had opened, then closed. Maybe. Maybe it was just the wind at a window—but there was not enough wind for that, was there? He braced his shoulders against the head of the bed. This was an old, old house. The stairs, the floors, would creak under the weight of anyone as big as Jargie. But if the back stairs creaked he would not hear them. The door between them and the kitchen was closed.

Somewhere another door squeaked. The kitchen door? Yes, he felt the draught. A draught always came up the back stairs when that door was opened. What he felt was air moving against his face after it flowed like a river down the hall.

A floorboard creaked in the hall. He pressed the PLAY button and held his breath.

He had made this tape months ago at a party in Kingston. It was like most such tapes: a blur of voices, now and then an outburst of laughter or a moment of silence. He turned the volume up. With a crutch in his hands for a weapon he sat rigid, watching the doorway. Jargie, knowing nothing of tape-recorders, would think he had a roomful of visitors. Maybe.

And it was early. Jargie would expect such callers to stay late. Jargie would go away, planning to come again some other time. Maybe.

The tape reels slowly turned. Someone told a joke. Laughter. Silence. "Rum and ginger, darling? Your glass is empty." A roomful of ghosts.

From the hall no sound. Nothing.

The tape ran on and on. It was good for an hour. His eyes burnt from staring at the doorway. An hour was for ever, sixty minutes, sixty times sixty seconds, in any one of which the hulk of Jargie might suddenly fill the doorway.

The tape ran out.

Now was the crucial moment. Now, if Jargie had not gone, it would happen. Carmody could not rewind the tape to play it again; there was no time. Anyway, the same series of

sounds would fool no-one twice. He held the crutch like a lance aimed at the doorway, and his knuckles turned white with tension.

Suddenly the light over his head flickered. The room went black. All was silent—and then, in the hall, a board creaked.

He dropped the crutch. He threw himself half off the bed, seized a second reel of tape and jabbed it blindly at the machine. In the hall, footsteps. Slow footsteps. Jargie was not sure. Jargie was coming to find out. But the hall was long and the darkness confused him.

The tape fought Carmody's fingers. It was a live snake struggling to escape and slither to the floor in the blackness. He caught it in both hands and forced it into place. The footsteps were just outside the door. They were bolder. He could hear a sound of breathing. PLAY!

The tape turned. The man in the hall took one more step and was in the doorway, peering into the room. But the room was dark. The tape began to sing.

It was a folk song, one of dozens this singer had sung for Carmody. The bold voice filled the room with a wail about a drowning—*Judy Drownded*—but it could have been any song.

In the doorway, nothing. For one, two, three minutes, nothing. Then something metallic clanged to the floor. A thunderclap cry exploded from terror-filled lungs. The ancient floorboards shivered under pounding footsteps—moving away into the night. Carmody sank limp on the bed.

The tape was still running when he heard the yell and the shots in the yard. The girl was still singing when Corporal Daley from the village police station strode into the room behind his flashlight, followed by old Mrs. Sheppard. Staring at the bed, surely expecting to find a dead man there, the corporal slowed to a halt.

"But how?" he muttered. "How did you—?"

He became aware of the song. He scowled at the recorder. "Gladlyn Henderson?" he said. "That *is* Gladlyn, isn't it?"

Carmody could only nod.

On the floor, Jargie's machete glistened in the flashlight beam. The corporal bent to pick it up, then looked at the machine again. "So that is what Jargie was running from. In the dark he thought—"

"Yes," Carmody said.

The girl Jargie had murdered sang on.

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Tying the Knot

The wedding came off next morning, at an early hour. Uncle Robert departed immediately afterwards and the wedded pair saw him go without much regret, for, unceasingly distracted by the indiscretions of his nieces, he had assumed a most aggrieved air. Throughout the ceremony he stood over Jacob like a gaoler, as though he suspected him of refusing at the last moment to make an honest woman of Antonia.

When it was over, he kissed the bride with a sort of grudging melancholy and wished her happy in a voice which prophesied immediate calamity. He shook hands with the groom, averting his eyes, and popped into his taxi.

MARGARET KENNEDY, *The Constant Nymph*

BRIDLING GROOM

The little church had been decorated throughout with Mrs. Jan Byl's favourite flowers—it resembled a mock ecclesiastical side-chapel in a high-class West End florists.

But it was not at the flowers that Mr. Squales was looking... So far every man was dressed in shapely black tails, with a vivid white rim of collar showing. Mr. Squales, radiant in his pearl grey, turned away and took up his place inconspicuously in the side aisle. He was thinking bitterly about the array of tails. "I'll bet they're all hired, the whole damn lot of 'em," he told himself...

There was no time for further thought, however. With a whirr from the electric bellows the organ started up. The best man gave Mr. Squales a nudge—rather an unnecessarily hard nudge, Mr. Squales thought it. And Mrs. Jan Byl, in white satin, followed by two tiny morsels, also in white satin and with dark red rosebuds in their hair, forged up the aisle.

NORMAN COLLINS, *London Belongs to Me*

MIXED RECEPTION

Nearly everyone in Sible Penden was outside the church, except the realist barman at The Green Lion. When asked if he did not want to watch the wedding he spat and observed he'd had enough of weddings to last him for the rest of his life . . .

Now there burst out the *Wedding March*, and down the aisle on her husband's arm came Viola Thompson-Wither-Spring, diffusing a strong odour of *Love in Paris,* and looking very pleased with herself, as well she might. Her husband's bright brown head was bent towards her, and all the women noticed this and cooed over it.

I'd sooner have my life than hers, Hetty thought, following them down the aisle. I wonder if he's drunk yet?

STELLA GIBBONS, *Nightingale Wood*

SCOTCHED

Worsted by Miranda's obstinacy, baffled, Sir Gynt Maclean had stood in the church by her side wearing the dress of his clan, his heart black with anger . . . As he stepped a pace back from the bridegroom, having given him his daughter, he could not stop thinking how he would have liked to have strangled the slippery thief.

Pride choked him. He came of a race that in its day would have murdered the bridegroom and locked up the bride . . . He saw Tuxie clearly as a trickster on his beam ends, but he had to go through with it, and with icy imprecations which never came up to his lips he had put on his kilt and medals and swished up the aisle with his flat, Scots step, and now stood silent at the side of his stolen girl.

ENID BAGNOLD, *The Loved and Envied*

TILL DEARTH US DO PART

Without any romance, or rapture, or sighs,
Without any tears in Miss Flora's blue eyes;
Or blushes, or transports, or such silly actions,
It was one of the quietest business transactions;
With a very small sprinkling of sentiment, if any,
And a very large diamond, imported by Tiffany.

WILLIAM ALLAN BUTLER,
Nothing to Wear

Alone in Shark Waters

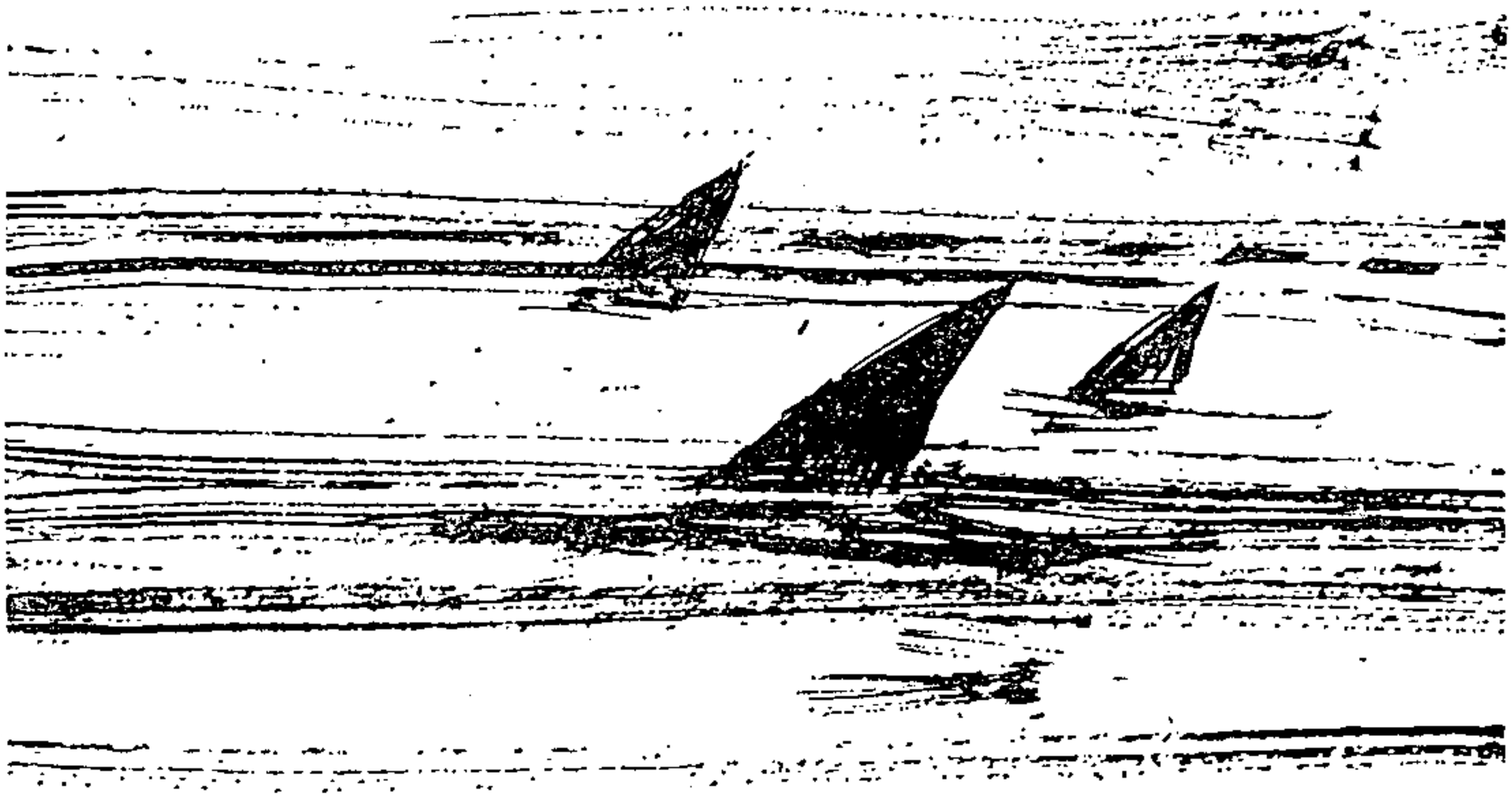
BY JOHN KRUSE

DOWN in the hold, the noise was ear-splitting. Every timber, the length and breadth of the *Ben Sidi Tajir,* seemed to be shrieking in agony. The single hurricane lamp swung sickeningly overhead, swilling its anæmic light around in the blackness. Mike Gardener shut his eyes and braced himself against a crate; he felt the ship lift and drop away crab-wise in a quick, double movement that sucked his stomach about inside him like water in a goat skin.

The passengers around him were now fully awake. They were sitting up among the cargo, chattering shrilly, the whites of their eyes showing clearly in the lamplight. There were about twenty of them travelling freight like himself from Ceylon to the Maldive Islands.

The *Ben Sidi Tajir* was a Maldivian schooner, and her run was between Colombo and the Islands. She was a cross between a *felucca* and a Spanish galleon, and her crew was a ragged bunch of Moplas, descended from the old Malabar Coast pirates. There was nothing those Moplas didn't know about the sea. They had smelled the wind coming five hours before it hit the ship. The ship was a full day out of port. There was nothing they could do but keep running and hope to miss it. When the wind was an hour away, they knew by the sky that they didn't have a chance. It was two in the morning, and Mike was asleep on deck. They had shaken him awake and told him to get below. Then they had dropped the big triangular sail, battened down the hatches and heaved to.

The only passenger accommodation was the hold, and Mike



had gone down there wondering what the panic was. He didn't wonder for long. It was a hurricane.

It hit the main mast with a shock that went right down into the ship and set up a howl in the rigging that made Mike's hackles creep. The ship was half empty, and with her galleon-like superstructure in the stern, she began to roll like a tar barrel.

Mike braced himself with his feet and listened to the grinding timbers and cursed. There were safer ways of getting to the Islands than in this relic, but none as cheap; when you speared fish for a living, you couldn't afford to ride fancy.

He was on his way to the Maldives to try the spearing there. He was planning to fish his way through the reefs, selling his catches as he went—a sort of working holiday. His spear gun lay on the rice sacks beside him, with his fins and mask strapped to the trigger guard. His only other baggage was a pack containing a change of clothing, a dozen harpoon heads and the sixty-foot reel he used for spearing in deep water.

The storm seemed to be getting worse. He could hear the Diesel auxiliary labouring hard in the struggle to keep the ship's head into the wind, felt the screw race in the air each time she toppled down into a trough. Near him, a Mopla woman lay on the sacks clutching her belly and whimpering. She was pregnant, and Mike couldn't tell if she was in labour or just seasick. She didn't seem to belong to anybody. He spoke to her in Singhalese, but she made no sign that she had heard him.

Suddenly the ship gave one of its quick, double movements.

There was a slow, grinding crash, and the vessel seemed to convulse. The lantern leaped from its hook, smashed against a crate and went out. Through the infernal din Mike heard the Moplas screaming and, in the blackness, felt the ship heave over on its side.

His instantaneous thought was that they had hit a reef. Then he knew they couldn't have. They were a full day's sail west of Ceylon; the water here was five hundred fathoms deep. The ship was breaking up. He grabbed up his most valuable possession, the spear gun, and struggled towards the Mopla woman. He fell across her and she screamed. He shouted at her that it was the American and, gripping her under the armpits, lifted her to her feet and half carried, half dragged her towards where he knew the gangway out of the hold to be.

The Moplas blundered together in the darkness, screaming and groping for the doorway. A match spurted near him. There was an instant of wild eyes and gleaming bodies. He spotted the gangway. The match went out as the crowd surged forward. The next moment, he and the woman were caught up in a crazy, struggling mass. Someone grabbed on to his back, clawed a way up over him. He kept hold of the woman and his gun, and shoved.

Suddenly something gave, and they were moving forward through water already knee-deep. It was deluging down from above, and there were figures up there against a faint square of sky trying to fight their way up through the water, but it was forcing them back. Then the boat rolled and the deluge stopped. Mike got the woman's hand and clamped it on to his belt, then heaved himself up on to the companionway. Someone got hold of his gun and tried to pull him down by it. The gun was so long that it was fouling everything, and he nearly decided to let it go. Then he changed his mind. It was his livelihood.

He wrenched the gun free and struggled up the ladder. There was someone above him; he lifted him by force clean out on deck, fell on top of him, rolled over and reached back down the hatch for the woman. He got hold of her by the hair just as a wave smashed down on to them. It flattened him against the deck; if he hadn't had hold of the woman, it would have knocked her off the ladder. Someone screamed. The water dragged at him and drained away. Mike gasped and opened his eyes.

The deck slanted right down into the sea; there were no

lights anywhere. The man beside him had disappeared. He had an impression of black mountains heaving against a sulphurous sky, of smashed rigging. Another wave crashed down on him like a ton weight, but he had the woman under the arms now and her weight anchored him.

As the wave hissed away, Mike pulled her out and got her down beside him on the slanting deck. More Moplas stumbled up out of the hatch. He was trying to remember where the lifeboats were. But the onslaught had been so quick, the crew wouldn't have had a chance to launch them. Something was sticking into his belly. It was the gun, with the fins and mask attached to it. He picked it up and looked around for something that would float. There was a life belt against the deckhouse; he caught the gleam of it in the darkness.

He took the woman's arms and hooked them over the hatch. He waited for the ship to roll back and tried to run along the sloping deck. His plimsols slipped. He hit the planking with a smack and began to slide.

Mike's mind cleared; beyond fear, coolly and carefully he watched for the rail, preparing to check against it with his feet. Its silhouette stood out clearly a foot above the foam.

Then something crashed down on top of him, and he was under water again, tons of it, black and heavy and solid. It burned up into his sinuses, filling his brain with stars. Then the weight seemed to lift, and he lifted with it, up and up and up. Then surprisingly, there was air. He gulped at it, opened his eyes, and saw the dark shape of the ship. It was below him. Scared that he would be smashed against it, he began to swim.

He swam with the wind, angling past the wreck. He was lifted and flung like a cork towards the tilted deck. Someone was clinging to the rail. Mike was dashed to within a foot of him, and sucked back. He saw the shine of water on the man's back, saw him hanging in the sudden vacuum; then the sea heaved up and tore the man loose. He couldn't see what happened to him.

The next moment Mike was clear of the stern, surrounded by blackness, unable to see or to gauge the waves, trying to time his breaths to coincide with his rises to the surface. There was so much water in the air it was difficult to tell when he was under and when he wasn't.

Hopelessness welled up in him. He was being swept away from the wreck into the raging blackness of the Indian Ocean. The nearest land was Ceylon, maybe a hundred miles to the

east. He knew that no boat had got clear of the ship and that his chances of being picked up were nil. But he made no attempt to fight his way back to the vessel. If he had he would have been drowned within a minute, and instinctively he knew it. He kept right on with the storm, out into the vastness and the darkness. And he was afraid.

He struggled in the whirl and plunge of the waters, sobbing for air, trying to think. But he couldn't think of anything. He felt that something was dragging him under and realised that it was the spear gun. The mask and fins strapped to it were cupping the water. It was natural for him to have the gun; he didn't wonder about it any more than a carpenter would wonder about having his hammer. Its five pounds of duralumin and steel were a part of him; now they were gripped in his right hand in a clutch that nothing short of death could have broken.

The familiarity of the gun steadied him. It never occurred to him to drop it. He hugged it in to his chest and kept swimming, and a process began in the back of his mind that suddenly became defiance. He was in the sea and he had the gun. It was the same sea—the sea that was his life, the sea that he dived and hunted in every day, all day—whipped up now into a frenzy, but still the same sea.

There were jokes in Colombo about his being half fish. Maybe he was. Well, this was *his* sea.

The idea grew, and the storm seemed to change; maybe it was really letting up—he didn't know, but he knew suddenly that he could beat it, the way a fighter can sometimes tell with his opponent the first moment he comes in against him. He could ride it out, and there would be a plane. They would be bound to send out a plane.

A big wave curled over on top of him from behind and buried him in darkness. He didn't fight it; he just lay in the water holding his breath. He felt himself falling. He was out of the back of it. He breathed until he felt the lift of the next one, gasped a lungful of air, and, as it broke over him, ripped off his trousers and shoes.

In the next wave he got rid of his shirt. He was naked now except for his belt and knife. He thought of trying to put his fins on, but he knew he could never make it.

He needed all the buoyancy he could get. With every gasp of air, he began to swallow some. He felt the bubbles form in his stomach and fought back the desire to belch them out.

He wrestled the spear gun around to the small of his back and clipped the butt hook on to his belt, so that he had the use of both arms.

He could lie along the surface then. It was like body-surfing, only the waves weren't breaking, they were running. Instead of carrying him with them, they swept by underneath, lifting and dropping him with a feet-to-head movement, so far and so fast he was jarred nearly senseless. The speed of the sea against the fins and mask drove the harpoon down between his legs and turned him over. He went under and nearly didn't come up.

He didn't want to jettison the gun, so he pulled around into the wind and faced the sea. The spray was wicked, but the movement was better. The gun behind him acted as a rudder.

Mike stayed that way, with the sea tearing past him, breaking through the waves, his mind stopped down to a pinpoint of concentration. Keep alive, he thought. Never mind where the wind is taking you. Just keep alive. Planes will scour the whole area. Ride it. Just ride it out. You've been in a spot before. How about Iwo Jima? What did you do then? Ride it out!

Wave after wave came—rush, rush, rush. The sounds dabbed and cleared in his ears monotonously, and it was the roaring and fading of sea shells, and then it was voices—loud, then soft. Then it was anæsthesia, with great whirling lights and the punch-punch of water fists in his eyes growing duller and, as time dragged by, imperceptible; he could feel nothing, and yet he knew it was still going on. There was movement and a sense of flying and sinking, but no feeling at all, nothing, and he got scared. He thought he was unconscious, that he was drowning. If only he could see something—anything—he would be able to tell!

He stared up at the sky blindly and twisted around, searching the darkness. Then behind him he saw a single, pale rent in the clouds. Dawn! Then he *was* conscious—the excitement, the relief of it! Mike twisted and began to swim towards the light but the spear gun fouled his legs instantly, and he went under.

As he sank down under the waves, something touched him. Despite his numbness, he felt it distinctly against his thigh—scaly and muscular and cold. The shock sobered him. He kicked convulsively to the surface.

The roughness and solidity had felt like a shark. He braced his muscles to resist the impact he thought must come.

His softness and nakedness became huge in his mind, as they do under machine-gun fire. He sucked in his belly, beat with his legs in an effort to get up above the sea. He imagined the great shape of the shark below him negotiating the heaving water, waiting for a trough. A trough came. Mike dropped down into it, feeling his belly vulnerable and unprotected. He clenched his teeth, eyes, fists, toes, and waited. Another wave came, another trough; again the tension, again nothing. Mike knew that he would soon exhaust himself. He must relax; if it came, it came.

But it didn't come. He relaxed gradually, prayed for light, and snatched another look at the east. The clouds were lifting off the horizon, revealing a long ingot of yellow light.

Hurry, hurry, he thought. But it didn't. It spread very slowly until the sea emerged from greyness and revealed itself fully, rolling and vast and lonely; he wished he had never seen it.

No creature rose to attack him, and gradually he got a hold on himself. He could handle the waves better now that he could see them; he could time his breathing. It was no worse than swimming in a monsoon sea, and he had had plenty of that.

He kept watching for a boat or a raft, but in all that endless expanse, there was only him. What of the other passengers, the crew? he wondered. Surely he wasn't alone?

Then suddenly the wind dropped. The effect was like deafness. The wind must have been diminishing for some time, and now suddenly there wasn't a breath, only the sea whishing and washing, but no spray and no thunder against his eardrums.

Relief came to him, and hope, and then something more arrogant—conquest. He had outlived the wind. The loneliness was back, worse than before. The sea stretched all around, endless and inescapable.

At last, the sun itself broke the ocean's rim, blazing a trail of weaving fire across the sea. The trail elongated and merged with the sky. The waves marched on Mike now in pink-gold echelons.

He felt all beaten up. Snap out of it, he thought, remembering the shark. Soon the fish would start feeding, and killer fish got very nasty in the early morning.

He got the gun unclipped and, lying with his face in the water, unstrapped the fins and mask. He got the fins on,

sinking slowly down as he fitted them on to his feet. He came up quickly, very quickly, and got the snorkel mask up out of the water and peered at it blearily. The glass was intact; so was the breathing-tube. The valve which kept the water out of the tube during a dive hinged freely. Thank God, he thought. He emptied the mask out, spat on the glass to stop it from clouding when he breathed, rinsed the mask out again, pulled it on and took a quick look down into the water. He did not know why he was so jumpy; there was nothing down there—only a few small shapes in the greyness. There wasn't enough light yet to see deep.

The harpoon was lashed against the barrel of the spear gun with the steel line. Lying on his face again, but breathing now through the snorkel tube—interruptedly, because the high sea kept dabbing the valve shut—Mike unwound the line and got the harpoon into the projector. He wrestled with the propulsion unit for nearly a minute before he managed to compress the heavy, double spring. As he floated to the surface and lay there, gasping weakly, he knew that that was the last time he would have the strength to do that. One shot—that was all he had.

The undersea dawned slowly beneath him. The rising sun rayed down through the plankton particles in bewildering, shifting patterns. He saw numerous fish, all fairly well down and shadowy still. It looked unbelievably deep. Something seemed to open up in his diaphragm and let the draught in. There would be fish out here he didn't know about—predatory giants as different from their reef relations as lions from alley cats.

The farther the sun got down into the water, the more fish he could see. Five, six, seven fathoms—there were fish and more fish, the deepest gleaming in the blue-blackness like sunken coins. Even as he watched, the pulse of their actions seemed to quicken. A pack of big blue-fish cut into a shoal of mackerel four fathoms below him. The mackerel raced off in a tight, terrified wedge. It had started.

The whole of the visible undersea seemed to speed up like a film. The fish became no more than streaks of colour in the ice-blue upper fathoms, tracing firework patterns of fear and hunger. Jacks and bonitos were everywhere, sometimes combining to tear with snapping jaws into a big shoal, then turning on one another to fight for the spoils.

The water became filled with little puffs of blood. The smell of it seemed to excite the fish to even greater ferocity and

fear. This battle period lasted, normally, half an hour in the morning and the same again at nightfall. Mike wished to hell they would stop. Barracuda and sharks went crazy at feeding time; they seemed to lose all their normal fear of noise and hostile action and behaved much more in accordance with their reputation.

Suddenly three six-foot torpedo-like shapes shot up out of the depths towards him. He had barely time to pull himself together before they had veered off and beaten away into the blueness. They were gun-metal and silver, and shaped like gigantic mackerel—tuna. Hell, he was slow! He realised then what a sitting target he was. Lucky that was all they had been; his reflexes were all in pieces from the storm.

Almost at once another big shape appeared below him, followed by several more. They moved through the water with a sickening rush, the big one in front working its jaws like a buzz-saw. They were blue sharks, with pectorals like bomb fins, and paper-knife noses.

Mike didn't have time to stir a muscle. They swept by underneath him, the big one spitting out fragments of fish into the water, which were snapped up by the ones behind. They were gone in an instant, and he was just letting out his breath when suddenly they were back.

It was as evil a procession as one could ever wish not to see: three pilot fish were above and slightly in front, their stripes fairly screaming danger; behind them came a ten-foot chunk of barrel-like blue muscle and, bringing up the rear, four half-grown versions of the same creature.

The sharks surged by, slamming their jaws, and disappeared into the dimness. Mike lay in the water and waited; but this time they didn't come back.

He sucked in a deep breath. It had been a matron shark airing the kids. If a plane didn't come soon, he thought...

Presently, the tempo of the underwater slowed down. Breakfast was over. Mike relaxed, flattened on the surface, beating automatically with his fins, rising and falling steadily, saving his strength. The sun climbed slowly up the sky. He was really tired now, tired and thirsty. He estimated that he had been in the water for seven hours. During a full day's spearing he sometimes kept going for eight without touching down. But that was in a calm sea and in sight of land. Land, he thought longingly, with the elephants ploughing through the coconut groves along by the sea.

It must have been about eleven o'clock when he heard the plane. He hoisted himself as far up in the water as he could and ripped off his mask. He saw it at once. It was a bi-plane. It was puttering over the sea about a mile to the north, with its nose high, obviously on the lookout for something. Mike waved his mask frantically, shouted and splashed about in the water, but it kept going steadily, and eventually disappeared.

It'll be back, he thought wildly. It's looking for the wreck. It's got to come back! He kept the mask off, forgetting the danger, forgetting everything but that up there was a fellow human being and that he must make this man see him. His heart began to thump, and a great deadness spread outwards from his diaphragm into his limbs.

The waves lifted and dropped him. From the crest of each he craned towards the horizon, open-mouthed, hoping to hear the engine. An especially big wave heaved up in front of him. He glanced at it, gauging it automatically, then stared at it, shocked. Encased in it, as though in green ice, was a shark. It was drifting sideways in the wave, its dorsal fin lazily breaking the crest.

In a moment it would be on top of him. He threshed about with his fins to scare it, at the same time fumbling with the mask. He got it on—half filled with water—blew it out and dived.

The creature had gone. He twisted around under the water. It was behind him. It was a heavy mottled shark, seven or eight feet long. It had seen him, all right, and seemed idly curious. With a careless flick of its big tail, it nosed to within six feet of him.

Mike had one idea in mind; that was to get rid of it. Spreading his arms and legs, he hooted into the mask.

The shark's languor left it instantly. With a bewilderingly swift movement, it turned and shot away at right angles; stopped, turned and hung there, staring at Mike with its little, cat-like eyes.

He cursed. These pelagic sharks weren't like the reef ones. That would have been enough even for a blackfin. He raised one ear out of the water and listened for the plane. It was coming! Its clatter reached him clearly over the waves. He took another look at the shark. Did he dare ignore it? The shark made a movement.

God! Mike thought. Not now. It can't come at me now!

But that was just what it did. He had to face it. He headed straight for it; desperation lent him strength.

Uncertainly the shark checked its advance with its pectorals. Mike kept right on, and when he was a dozen feet away from the shark he blew a burst of bubbles at it through his snorkel tube. The big mottled body jack-knifed and turned and fled, thudding the water with its tail.

Mike hit the surface and snatched off the mask all in one movement. The roar of the plane spanked his ears like a thunderclap. It was right overhead. He tried to shout, but he hadn't any air. He gasped to fill his lungs, took in some water, and choked.

The blind belly of the plane passed over him. It was an old Gladiator, with fixed undercarriage. He managed to get the gun up and wagged the duralumin in the sunlight, but the plane just pulled away steadily across the waves. He made a noise at last, something between a gasp and a scream. It just had to see him! Weird sounds dragged from his throat as he watched the machine diminish, and heard the engine grow fainter, fainter, then merge with the rush of the sea.

He was alone. He subsided, exhausted, into the waves, lying there weak and uncaring, letting the water drain into his parted mouth, letting its green weight close over him.

Oh, God, he thought. Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God.

The sun had swung over behind him and was sinking slowly towards the sea. He had been swimming since morning, weakly but steadily. After the plane, he had lain in the water a while; then some inward strength had got hold of him, turned him towards the eastern horizon, and forced his limbs to move.

Everything that was reasonable in him resisted. If another plane or a ship were to come, it would come; swimming wouldn't help. And if it didn't come the sharks would. Land, allowing the maximum for drift, was about seventy miles away, and he had never swum more than twenty miles in his life.

But the stubborn spirit in him did not listen. It only knew that there was land over there below the eastern rim, solid and sweet-smelling and green, and that here there was only death. It drew him through the water—desperately.

His thighs were cramping a little, and he had chafe from the fins across the insteps of both feet. When they began to bleed, the sharks would pick up his trail; and yet he kept on, at intervals rolling his head up—sideways, to save energy—to look along the sea and at the sky. They were clear and empty

and endless, and the light was glorious. He felt small in so much emptiness.

From his mouth and his throat right down to his stomach, he was puckered dry with brine. There wasn't a bead of moisture left in him. He wouldn't last the day. Sea creatures like Hallowe'en masks came and went, appearing suddenly an inch from his face, then darting away. All day it had been the same, and he had let them come, grateful for their company.

Now, suddenly, he shortened the gun in his hand, jabbed at one with the protruding spear and transfixed it. He trapped its fin movements with his fingers, glancing around instinctively. Experience had taught him that often when you speared a fish, sharks, drawn by the sound of finny panic in the water, jumped you so fast they might have been fired.

He waited. Nothing happened. Without any conscious reasoning, Mike turned on his back and wrenched the fish off the barb, pushed back his mask and squeezed the lymphatic juices from its wound into his mouth. They were rank and oily and mingled with blood, but they were free from salt, and he wondered vaguely how he had known they would be.

When he had squeezed the fish dry, he threw it as far from him as possible and spiked another. He caught six; then, using his knife, he cut the last one into strips and ate it raw.

He felt strange and defiant, and when he sprawled back under the water, he felt no nausea but a sort of amazement. He would get stronger; he could keep alive for days like this. Then reason re-asserted itself. Not without sleep, it said. His eyelids felt heavy at the thought of it. His legs stopped beating. The water was soft and warm. The movement of the waves had subsided to a soothing rhythm. His head sank.

Suddenly his eyes flicked open, and he was staring along the underglow of his own stomach. A yard from his legs was the bluish head of a shark.

He slapped the water with both fins and got himself around somehow. The solid body flicked sideways and circled lazily around him. It was more than twice his length. Then somehow there was another, rock-steady in the water and growing towards him. Mike knew he couldn't fight them. He hadn't the strength. They circled around him, puzzled by his reluctance to escape.

Mike watched them, heavy-eyed; watched a third one come —smaller, this one, with a newt-like head and dappled like a newt—a tiger shark.

There was always the gun. It was his ace, he thought, admitting to himself now what had been in the back of his mind all along. He would put it under his chin and squeeze the trigger with his bare heels.

Now, he thought. Before it's too late. The deliberate circles were narrowing steadily. He lay in the water wondering vaguely why he didn't act. There seemed to be five of them now, then six.

The undersea was darkening fast. Feeding time, he thought. They would go crazy, and it would be too late to do anything. But still he lay in the water. Deep down in him there was something that refused to die. Coward! he said angrily.

Then he was panning the gun carefully, aiming at the tiger, centring on one eye. And he knew why: it was half-grown and softer-skinned than the others, and he had to cripple it. It came in close. At seven feet he let the shark have it.

There was the sound of slithering steel and a blur and a jolt. The gun leaped out of his hand, and he was gasping air through the snorkel while the shark spun around in a tight, clockwise circle. It didn't pull out of it or stop, but just tore on round and round like a Catherine wheel, and Mike knew he got it right in the eye.

The other sharks froze in the water; surprised, they hung there for a full moment; then they got it. All five of them hit the tiger together, rending and snapping crazily. A great cloud of blood spread in the water.

Mike dragged himself away from the scene. It was better without the gun. He swam until he couldn't go another stroke. Then he lay out in the water, panting so hard that the mask sucked in against his face with every breath.

He stared back behind him, but there was only a redness. Nothing came after him. He had played his ace.

There was no moon. The water heaved in the sultry darkness, glimmering with phosphorescence. Stars drifted above and below him. He seemed to be beating slowly through space. Darkness engulfed him; then schizopod shrimps would rise like lonely suns, thickened into constellations and drift away, and brilliant dusts would form on the undertide, then condense and flood the sea with protozoic flame. He watched his hands, leprous and white, grope through the fiery sea and traced with half-dreaming eyes the comet paths of fish. Then there was only darkness, blacker than before.

He would lift his head with an effort, into the cooler air,

check with the dimmer stars for east, and hear the immeasurable sigh of the ocean. Sometimes he heard across the waves, like a gun, the sound of manta hitting the sea, and knew that somewhere nearby great thirty-foot bodies were rushing together, leaping high into the air, pressed wing tip to wing tip in their mating dance.

The Pleiades swung, and the waters gleamed and died, and once something vast and terrible rose like a city in the waves. Mike heard the water draining from its sides and saw its darkness blotting out the sea. It made a sound—something between a hiss and a moan—and presently it slid back into the depths. He heard the water sucking down after it long after it had gone.

Another sun rose, a burning eye set level with the sea. And still Mike's legs were moving, just moving. Now, he thought, now the sharks will come again, and he thought of them only as liberators who would free him from the instinct that tortured him on.

Again the undersea dawn began, and nothing came—nothing but jellies, coloured like sunset on ice, filling the sea with their tilted, opening-and-closing parasols; and the dorados, they came. With a glint of gold and greeny-blue, they skidded into him and turned him over. They were under him and over him and around him and away, kicking up the water in bursts of saline fire. And there was blood in the sea where the tuna caught the dorados. And still nothing came.

Mike caught a fish in his hands and ate it. He couldn't see any sense in it, but he couldn't stop himself either. His legs continued to move, almost automatically, and at high noon he saw his mother, her little-girl face collapsed with age, and she was saying in her child-voice: "All failure is a kind of death," and he thought how right she was. He had forgotten her failure with the old man. It seemed to him then that they were still together and perfectly happy. He was a little crazy.

And then a shark came. It came up behind him in the molten-metal sea, cutting through the water like the keel of a sailing ship.

"Come on, you dog," Mike said to it, and: "You're late! Just like the ten-o'clock scholar." (He was back at school.)

He waited for it, but it wouldn't come in, just sniffed at his fins and took a wide turn around him. He wanted it to come in, but it wouldn't take him. Yesterday he had wanted to live, but now he didn't care. If he could have slept, he would have

been all right, but now he just wanted the shark to hurry up and get it over with.

So he turned his back, and when he looked around again the shark was gone. It stayed gone, and the sun burned down on the sea, which became like watered silk, very glossy and silent, and the sound he made blowing through the snorkel seemed to grow very loud, like the roaring of locomotives.

He relaxed into a kind of dream, and he was back home, in the old apartment, dirty from working at the garage. The old man was there, and Mike had just said he couldn't stick it any more with Mum gone and everything shot to pieces the way it was—that he was heading for the Far East, Ceylon maybe.

His old man looked up at him over the tops of his glasses, with his mouth turned down and his eyes preoccupied with other people and other places, and, seeing him like that, Mike suddenly realised that he really was an old man.

Then the sun drowned in a sea of blood, and he was alone in the dusk with the night moving up the sky. This was his last night, he thought. Tonight he would die. There was nothing left in him to regret with or to pray with, nothing but this instinct driving him on with limbs he could no longer feel.

At last the sharks came. They came with the departing light, like slim blades in the sea. There was nothing to stop them, but they came on carefully, avoiding his fire-trail in the darkening water. He closed his eyes. It was getting late.

The sunset's imprisoned image burned dimly in his brain, like a candle guttering low, and sounds grew enormous in the water. For an instant, poised on the edge of delirium, he heard the whimper of his own fins and, behind them, the shudder of tails, like someone thrumming the deadened bass string of a harp with their fingernails. The tempo increased. Now, he thought. At last! The water shook against him, beat on his eardrums, diminished and was still.

His lids flickered. Below, in the iridescence, fish-trails sparkled through the water like a million shooting stars. They streaked ahead of him and were gone; then more, in gleaming panic, raced by—then more and more.

There was thunder in the sea, but he didn't hear it. He fell into a dreamy state. It seemed to him that the waters were boiling around him with phosphorescent light; that he was lifted and flung, buffeted by tails, flung again; that in the luminosity he saw the ocean packed solid with gleaming backs, heard their panting and heaving. Then he was down under the water, and the migrating, false killer-whales were above

him, lighted by the phosphorescence, belly upon belly, rank upon rank.

Then somehow there was air and the sea eddied and gleamed, and the turmoil rumbled away across the sea, and he was alone.

A light forced its way under his lids, and he turned away from it. There were cold bodies around him, and when he moved they squirmed. It was still a dream, and it was wrong somehow that there should be a man in it, holding a lamp, and, in the dimness, others staring at him.

They wore ragged sarongs, and they looked for all the world like Singhalese fishermen. For some reason their eyes were wide and frightened. Their hands were dragging at a net; Mike realised suddenly that he was in the net—caught!

He learned later that he had wound up a mile off Galle, South Ceylon. He never knew how; probably the current had been working with him all the way. But somehow he had made it. The fishermen admitted afterwards that they had thought he was some strange kind of monster and had nearly lit into him with their gaffs.

The incident certainly gave rise to some queer tales which Mike didn't altogether like. The *Ceylon Courier* gave him a full-page spread. "Fish-man," the article called him again and again, and when he got out of the hospital and went down into Colombo, people looked at him strangely and weren't quite sure what to do with their eyes when they talked to him. He never spoke about it much himself, because of the feeling he had had in the net.

He knew it was a net and that they were men around him —and he was afraid. The lamp seemed to draw his eyes till the flame filled his mind, and in the darkness all around, there was terror. He gasped for air, but none would come. He struggled, and the other fish around him struggled, and he twisted and kicked, knowing only that he must get back to the sea, that he must slither back somehow into the dark cavern of the water and dart away through the softness and the silence to where he belonged. It was a sensation of the purest fear—uninhibited by logic or pride or anything human, undiluted and nightmarish—such as only a wild creature might feel when it falls a victim to man.

Then one of the Singhalese bent over him and took off his fouled-up mask, and there was air in a cool rush and he blacked out.

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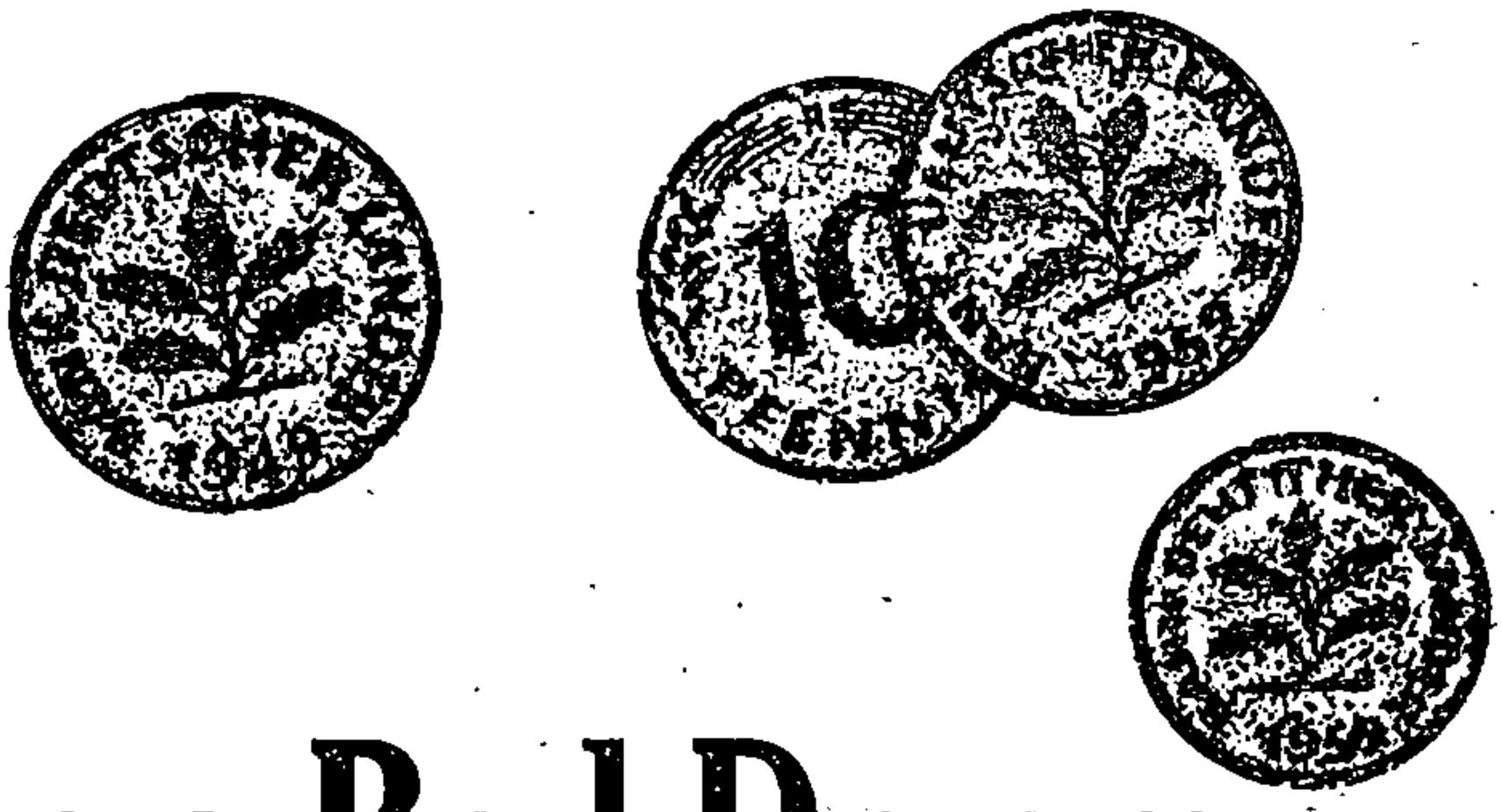

Like a Bad Dream

THAT evening we had invited the Zumpens over for dinner, nice people, and it was through my father-in-law that we had got to know them. Ever since we have been married he has helped me to meet people who can be useful to me in business, and Zumpen can be useful: he is chairman of a committee which places contracts for large housing projects, and I have married into the excavating business.

I was tense that evening, but Bertha, my wife, reassured me.

"The fact," she said, "that he's coming at all is promising. Just try and get the conversation round to the contract. You know it's tomorrow it's going to be awarded."

I stood looking through the net curtains of the glass front door, waiting for Zumpen. I smoked, ground the cigarette butts under my foot, and shoved them under the mat. Next I took up a position at the bathroom window and stood there wondering why Zumpen had accepted the invitation; he couldn't be that interested in having dinner with us, and the fact that the big contract I was involved in was going to be awarded tomorrow must have made the whole thing as embarrassing to him as it was to me.

I thought about the contract, too: it was a big one, I would make 20,000 marks on the deal, and I wanted the money.

Bertha had decided what I was to wear: a dark jacket, trousers a shade lighter, and a conservative tie. That's the kind of thing she learned at home, and at boarding-school from the nuns. Also what to offer guests: when to pass the cognac, and when the vermouth, how to arrange desserts. It is comforting to have a wife who knows all about such things.

But Bertha was tense, too. As she put her hands on my

I could feel my heart thumping as I thought of the 20,000 marks . . .

BY HEINRICH BÖLL

shoulders, they touched my neck, and I felt her thumbs damp and cold against it. "It's going to be all right," she said. "You'll get the contract."

"God," I said, "it means 20,000 marks to me, and you know how we need the money."

"One should never," she said gently, "mention God's name in connection with money."

A dark car drew up in front of our house, a make I didn't recognise, but it looked Italian.

"Take it easy," Bertha whispered, "wait till they've rung, let them stand there for a couple of seconds, then walk slowly to the door and open it."

I watched Mr. and Mrs. Zumpen come up the steps. He is slender and tall with greying temples, the kind of man who fifty years ago would have been known as a ladies' man; Mrs. Zumpen is one of those thin dark women who always make me think of lemons. I could tell from Zumpen's face that it was a frightful bore for him to have dinner with us.

Then the doorbell rang, and I waited for one second, two seconds, walked slowly to the door and opened it.

"Well," I said, "how nice of you to come!"

Cognac glasses in hand, we went from room to room in our apartment, which the Zumpens wanted to see. Bertha stayed in the kitchen to squeeze some mayonnaise out of a tube on to the appetisers; she does this very nicely—hearts, loops, little houses. The Zumpens complimented us on our apartment; they exchanged smiles when they saw the big desk in my study; at that moment it seemed a bit too big even to me. Zumpen admired a small rococo cabinet, a wedding

present from my grandmother, and a baroque madonna in our bedroom.

By the time we got back to the dining room, Bertha had dinner on the table. She had done this very nicely, too—it was all so attractive yet so natural, and dinner was pleasant and relaxed. We talked about films and books, about the recent elections, and Zumpen praised the assortment of cheeses, and Mrs. Zumpen praised the coffee and the pastries. Then we showed the Zumpens our honeymoon pictures: photographs of the Breton coast, Spanish donkeys, and street scenes from Casablanca.

After that we had some more cognac, and when I stood up to get the box with the photos of the time when we were engaged, Bertha gave me a sign, and I didn't get the box. For two minutes there was absolute silence, because we had nothing more to talk about, and we all thought about the contract. I thought of the 20,000 marks, and it struck me that I could deduct the bottle of cognac from my income tax.

Zumpen looked at his watch and said: "Too bad, it's ten o'clock; we have to go. It's been such a pleasant evening!"

And Mrs. Zumpen said: "It was really delightful, and I hope you'll come to us one evening."

"We would love to," Bertha said, and we stood around for another half-minute, all thinking again about the contract, and I felt Zumpen was waiting for me to take him aside and bring up the subject. But I didn't. Zumpen kissed Bertha's hand and I went ahead, opened the doors, and held the car door open for Mrs. Zumpen down below.

"Why," said Bertha gently, "didn't you mention the contract to him? You know it's going to be awarded tomorrow."

"Well," I said, "I didn't know how to bring the conversation round to it."

"Now look," she said in a quiet voice, "you could have used any excuse to ask him into your study; that's where you should have talked to him. You must have noticed how interested he is in art. You ought to have said: I have an eighteenth-century crucifix in there you might like to have a look at, and then . . ."

I said nothing, and she sighed and tied on her apron. I followed her into the kitchen. We put the rest of the appetisers back in the refrigerator, and I crawled about on the floor looking for the top of the mayonnaise tube. I put away the remains of the cognac, counted the cigars: Zumpen had smoked only one. I emptied the ashtrays, ate another pastry,

and looked to see if there was any coffee left in the pot. When I went back to the kitchen, Bertha was standing there with the car key in her hand. "What's up?" I asked.

"We have to go over there, of course," she said.

"Over where?"

"To the Zumpens'," she said. "Where do you think?"

"It's nearly half-past ten."

"I don't care if it's midnight," Bertha said. "All I know is, there's 20,000 marks involved. Don't imagine they're squeamish."

She went into the bathroom to get ready and I stood behind her, watching her wipe her mouth and draw in a new outline, and for the first time, I noticed how wide and primitive that mouth was. When she tightened the knot of my tie I could have kissed her, the way I always used to when she fixed my tie, but I didn't.

Downtown the cafés and restaurants were brightly lit. People were sitting outside on the terraces, and the light from the street lamps was caught in the silver icecream dishes and ice buckets. Bertha gave me an encouraging look; but she stayed in the car when we stopped in front of the Zumpens' house, and I pressed the bell at once and was surprised how quickly the door was opened.

Mrs. Zumpen did not seem surprised to see me. She had on some black lounging pyjamas with loose, full trousers embroidered with yellow flowers, and this made me think more than ever of lemons. "I beg your pardon," I said, "I would like to speak to your husband."

"He's gone out again," she said, "he'll be back in half an hour."

In the hall I saw a lot of madonnas, gothic and baroque, even rococo madonnas, if there is such a thing. "I see," I said, "well, if you don't mind I'll come back in half an hour."

Bertha had bought an evening paper; she was reading it and smoking, and when I sat down beside her she said: "I think you could have talked about it to her, too."

"But how do you know he wasn't there?"

"Because I know he is at the Gaffel Club playing chess, like he does every Wednesday evening at this time."

"You might have told me that earlier."

"Please try and understand," said Bertha, folding the newspaper. "I am trying to help you. I want you to find out for yourself how to deal with such things. All we had to do

was call up Father and he would have settled the whole thing for you with one phone call, but I want you to get the contract on your own."

"All right," I said, "then what'll we do: wait here half an hour, or go up right away and have a talk with her?"

"We'd better go up right away," said Bertha.

We got out of the car and went up in the lift together.

"Life," said Bertha, "consists of making compromises and concessions."

Mrs. Zumpen was no more surprised now than she had been earlier, when I had come alone. She greeted us, and we followed her into her husband's study. She brought some cognac, poured it out, and before I could say anything about the contract she pushed a yellow folder towards me.

"Housing Project Fir Tree Haven," I read, and looked up in alarm at Mrs. Zumpen, at Bertha, but they both smiled.

Mrs. Zumpen said: "Open the folder."

I opened it; inside was another one, pink, and on this I read: "Housing Project Fir Tree Haven—Excavation Work." I opened this too, saw my estimate lying there on top of the pile; along the edge someone had written: *Lowest bid.*

I could feel myself flushing with pleasure, my heart thumping, and I thought of the 20,000 marks. "God," I said softly, and closed the file, and this time Bertha forgot to rebuke me.

"*Prost*," said Mrs. Zumpen with a smile. "Let's drink to it, then."

We drank, and I stood up and said: "It may seem rude of me, but perhaps you'll understand that I would like to go home now."

"I understand perfectly," said Mrs. Zumpen. "There's just one small item to be taken care of."

She took the file, leafed through it, and said: "Your price per square metre is thirty pfennigs below that of the next-lowest bidder. I suggest you raise your price by fifteen pfennigs. That way, you'll still be the lowest and you'll have made an extra four thousand five hundred marks. Come on, do it now!"

Bertha took her pen out of her bag and offered it to me, but I was in too much of a turmoil to write. I gave the file to Bertha and watched her alter the price with a steady hand, rewrite the total, and hand the file back to Mrs. Zumpen.

"And now," said Mrs. Zumpen, "just one more little thing. Get out your cheque book and write a cheque for three

thousand marks. A cheque to cash, and endorsed by you."

She had said this to me, but it was Bertha who pulled our cheque book out of her bag and made out the cheque.

"*It won't be covered,*" I said *in a low voice.*

"When the contract is awarded, there will be an advance and then it will be covered," said Mrs. Zumpen.

Perhaps I failed to grasp what was happening at the time. As we went down in the lift, Bertha said she was happy, but I said nothing.

Bertha chose a different way home. We drove through quiet residential districts; I saw lights in open windows, people sitting on balconies drinking wine. It was a clear, warm night.

"I suppose the cheque was for Zumpen?" was all I said, softly. Bertha replied, just as softly: "Of course."

I looked at Bertha's small, brown hands on the steering-wheel, so confident and quiet. Hands, I thought, that sign cheques and squeeze mayonnaise tubes, and I looked higher at her mouth, and still felt no desire to kiss it.

That evening I did not help Bertha put the car away in the garage, nor did I help her with the washing-up. I poured myself a large cognac, went up to my study and sat down at my desk, which was much too big for me. I was wondering about something. I got up, went into the bedroom and looked at the baroque madonna, but even there I couldn't put my finger on the thing I was wondering about.

The ringing of the phone interrupted my thoughts. I lifted the receiver and was not surprised to hear Zumpen's voice.

"Your wife," he said, "made a slight mistake. She raised the price by twenty-five pfennigs instead of fifteen."

I thought for a moment and then said: "That wasn't a mistake. She did it with my consent."

He was silent for a second or two, then said with a laugh: "So you had already discussed the various possibilities?"

"Yes," I said.

"*All right then, make out another cheque for a thousand.*"

"Five hundred," I said, and I thought: It's like a bad dream —that's what it's like.

"Eight hundred," he said, and I said with a laugh: "Six hundred," and I knew, although I had no experience to go on, that he would now say seven hundred and fifty, and when he did I said, "Yes," and hung up.

It was not yet midnight when I went downstairs and over in the car to give Zumpen the cheque. He was alone and

just laughed as I reached in to hand him the folded cheque.

When I walked slowly back into the house, there was no sign of Bertha. She didn't appear when I went back into my study; she didn't appear when I went downstairs again for a glass of milk from the refrigerator, and I knew what she was thinking. She was thinking: He has to get over it, and I have to leave him alone, this is something he has to understand.

But I never did understand. It is beyond understanding.

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Translated from the German by Leila Vennewitz

I NEVER EVEN SUGGESTED IT

I know lots of men who are in love and lots of men who
are married and lots of men who are both,
And to fall out with their loved ones is what all of them
are most loth.
They are conciliatory at every opportunity,
Because all they want is serenity and a certain amount
of impunity.
Yes, many the swain who has finally admitted that the
earth is flat
Simply to sidestep a spat,
Many the masculine Positively or Absolutely which has
been diluted to an If
Simply to avert a tiff,
Many the two-fisted executive whose domestic conversa-
tion is limited to a tactfully interpolated Yes,
And then he is amazed to find that he is being raked
backwards over a bed of coals nevertheless.
These misguided fellows are under the impression that
it takes two to make a quarrel, that you can sidestep
a crisis by nonaggression and nonresistance,
Instead of removing yourself to a discreet distance.
Passivity can be a provoking *modus operandi*;
Consider the Empire and Gandhi.
Silence is golden, but sometimes invisibility is golder,
Because loved ones may not be able to make bricks with-
out straw, but often they don't need any straw to
manufacture a bone to pick or a chip for their soft
white shoulder.
It is my duty, gentlemen, to inform you that women are
dictators all, and I recommend to you this moral:
In real life it takes only one to make a quarrel.

OGDEN NASH, *Marriage Lines*

THERE'S NOWT TO IT — I COULD GROW TOBACCO STANDIN' ON ME 'EAD

The Plantationer

BY ALEX WHITNEY

SAM HARDCASTLE was a good, honest, solid and hard-working Lancashire man. There was nothing complicated about Sam. He said what he meant and meant what he said, even if it wasn't always the right thing to say or mean. All he asked from life was a warm bed, a roof over his head, and enough loose change for a few pints and a fill for his pipe. Alice was just taken for granted, as are all wives of good, honest, solid, hardworking Lancashire men. But Alice was of the same calibre as her husband, so the lack of romance never triggered off tears or tantrums. Lancashire women are strong, especially women like Alice, who had lived through the days of the Depression; had worked as a thirteen-year-old child at a loom, and had brought up a family of eight on little more than a couple of pounds a week.

But the children were gone now—four married, two in the merchant navy, one in London and one killed on a motorbike. Only Alice, Sam and Grandma lived in Mafeking Terrace with the little patch of garden at the back. Alice and Sam had never lived alone since they married. In the early days of married struggling they had lived with Alice's parents, three brothers and two sisters. Then, when their first was born, they managed to get a little cottage and now, when their children had left them in peace, Alice's mother needed looking after.

No-one was too sure how old Grandma was, but she was old. Old, wiry and domineering. A tiny, wizened woman with wispy white hair and teeth that didn't quite fit.

"When are you goin' to put some coal on this 'ere fire, Sam

'Ardcastle?" Grandma would rasp from the depths of her black woollen shawl. "My rheumatism's fair givin' me gip."

Sam would pull himself out of the easy chair with the broken springs and go muttering out to the coal shed in the backyard which separated the house from the "back" and the little garden.

But one day he didn't move, except to wave her into silence. He was listening to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's crackling voice giving the nation the bad news about the budget on the old wireless that had served to relay Sir Winston Churchill's rousing speeches to the Hardcastles in Mafeking Terrace, in those "dark days."

"By gum," he said, finally. "They've gone t'far this time." With that, he left Grandma sitting by the parlour fire and shuffled off in his threadbare old slippers to the big square kitchen where Alice was standing with her hands deep in the mixing-bowl and flour on the front of her strong, grey hair.

"They've done it again, Alice. They've gone t'far. I knew they would."

Alice continued stoically to pound her pastry mixture. She never bothered to ask Sam questions. He'd tell her what he was talking about in his own good time.

"I was sayin' to our Cyril only t'other day. If they do it again I shall grow me own." He paused to see what effect that would have on Alice.

"Sam 'Ardcastle, me feet is freezin'. Fetch some coal." Grandma had a powerful voice even if the pitch was high.

But Sam ignored the instructions from the parlour and, seeing no effect registering itself on Alice's face, continued: "They've put the price of tobacco up again. I'm goin' to grow me own."

"Dost tha know 'ow, lad?" The only way to tell when Alice was slightly taken aback was by the way she lapsed into the old Lancashire dialect. Her eyes remained perfectly impassive as she looked at him, standing there with his old waistcoat unbuttoned and his union shirt open at the neck and collarless.

"Ee, there's nowt to it, lass," he said with the chuckling confidence he adopted whenever he didn't know the first thing about some particular problem. "There's nowt to it at all. I could grow it standin' on me 'ead."

"Well, if standin' on yer 'ead's the big secret, Sam Hardcastle, stand on yer 'ead and get some coal on that parlour fire. Grandma must be frozen."

The smile fell off his chubby face and he muttered, " Th'ould woman's all right. She's nearly sat in t'grate."

As he carried the shovel of coal into the parlour Grandma looked up from the morning paper she was reading and let loose on Sam with her sharp little tongue. " Sittin' in t'grate am I? Eh? Well, if tha'd shape tha sen more often 'appen I wouldna 'ave to." Grandma was deaf only when it suited her. On such occasions, for example, as when she was asked to move a little farther away from the fire and give someone else a chance, or when she was asked to help with the washing-up, which wasn't often.

True to his word, Sam got some tobacco seeds, turned the soil over, pulled up all his rhubarb and planted out his little square garden. It caused no small stir among the neighbours and several people even gave him advance orders for the special Hardcastle leaf which was destined to rise up, honey brown and fragrant, from the good Lancashire soil.

It rose up all right, up and up and up. It grew to approximately six feet high and gave a pretty good impression of the Malayan jungle. Sam had as many problems as a tobacco baron. One of the main ones was steeling himself against the ribbing he got from all sides.

" 'Appen when Jack's finished waterin' his blessed beanstalk, 'e'll put some coal on this fire," was one of Grandma's favourites.

Cyril, their second son, was fond of comparing Sam's little plantation with that featured in a film starring Bette Davis which he had seen as a child. " Ee, I remember it like it were yesterday, Dad. They 'ad umpteen slaves workin' for 'em on this 'ere plantation and all t'fellas wore white suits. Well, them in charge like, ya know. You should get yerself a white suit, Dad, and make that backyard into one of them verandas, then you could sit out on it in a big rockin' chair, smokin' them Havana cigars."

" Ya big gawp," said Sam, sick of the sound of the whole business by now. " Why do you think I'm growing me own? So's I can go out and buy them Havanas?"

The end house of Mafeking Terrace was occupied by a dirty, flea-ridden old woman of foul temper and filthy habits. She shared her house with fifteen cats of assorted sizes and colours and, inevitably, these became a constant source of irritation to Sam.

"I told you, Sam," Alice said, "before you started, I told you them cats'd be in yer tobacco. We 'ad enough trouble tryin' to keep 'em out of the rhubarb. 'Ow on earth you expected t'be able to keep 'em out o' that little Sherwood, I'll never know."

One night, as Sam tossed and turned, trying to get to sleep to the accompaniment of unearthly feline mating-calls, his patience gave out and he leapt out of bed, took hold of one of his boots and let fly with it from the window. There was a great screeching and rustling as of a platoon of battle-weary soldiers beating the jungle for unarmed natives, and a great exodus of cats from the plantation took place.

It gave Sam a certain amount of satisfaction but the following morning found him stepping carefully through his precious tobacco plants in search of a boot.

"I told you thirty years ago," muttered Grandma from the back step. "I told you you should 'ave married that lad from th'Argyle. T'were a good mill, th'Argyle. They didna do much short time at th'Argyle."

"Oh, Mother," said Alice, unflinching, "I knew Sam were a stubborn fool when I married 'im."

"Aye, an' 'e dunna change much." The old woman shuffled back into the house muttering about the chances Alice had thrown over to marry Sam, although Alice couldn't quite remember ever having had any other chances.

The tobacco grew and flourished but there was one big problem as far as the actual growing was concerned. The climate. In recognised tobacco-growing areas throughout the world, the sun tends to shine a little more than it does in Lancashire. Sam hadn't bargained for this and his treasured tobacco refused to turn from a tired green to a promising brown.

On summer Sunday evenings he would wander out while Grandma listened to *Sing Something Simple* and Alice stepped out in her Sunday coat to sing her favourite hymns at the Ragged School. He liked to lean against the untidy fence he had built with old wood salvaged from torn-down garages and hen coops and peer into the thick of it. The view, of course, was limited as the tobacco was over six feet high and Sam

was five-feet four. He would happily mull over his achievement for a time, but then the terrible problem of what to do with it next would worm its way into his mind.

"You'll 'ave to cut it down and dry it, Dad." This seemed the only sensible thing young Cyril had ever said in his life and Sam bought him a pint of bitter to show his appreciation. While they were in The Bricklayer's Arms discussing the serious problem of converting the fertile plant life to pipefuls of delicious, aromatic, tax-free, home-grown produce, many voices were raised in advice. Some of the advice was unprintable, some unpractical and some incredible. All in all, no-one appeared to know the ins and outs of the intricate business of tobacco production.

One Saturday afternoon Sam went out into his little domain with a rusty scythe and cut the lot down. This disturbed nearly a dozen dozing cats and five newly-born kittens, but Sam, undeterred, carried on and by sunset had gathered his crop into a large, menacing, dull-green mound.

"Ne'er mind, Dad," said Cyril, grinning. "It'll 'appen turn brown when it's been dried."

Sam took consolation in this and went into the kitchen to face Alice and broach the question of where it should hang to dry.

"Yer not 'anging it in my kitchen, Sam 'Ardcastle an' that's that." Alice meant what she said and no amount of talk would change her mind. The kitchen was Alice's kingdom. Sam, Grandma, the kids or anybody else were only "passers-through," invited guests. The kitchen was Alice's and what Alice said in the kitchen and about the kitchen was instant law. No smelly old tobacco leaves hanging about for Alice.

"I've got to 'ang it up somewhere, luv." Sam was becoming worried and if he could have turned the clock back to his peaceful pre-tobacco-growing days, he would not have hesitated to do so.

"Well," Alice was softening, "if you promise not to leave it 'anging about too long you can put it in t'back bedroom." She spoke in the same tone she had used many times when giving in over letting Cyril, or one of the others, keep a jar of tadpoles.

Sam was delighted. Just the job, he thought, and rushed upstairs with a large ball of string.

For several years Grandma had had to sleep downstairs because, as she said, her legs were bad. Sam never missed an

opportunity to point out that her legs were good enough to carry her up to The Bricklayer's Arms with a jug on Sunday mornings.

"What d'ya think's kept me alive so long, Sam 'Ardcastle?" she would scoff. "I take it fer me 'ealth." Rain, hail, sleet or snow, Grandma would pull the thick, black woollen shawl round her tiny frame and trot off, just after opening time, for her jug of draught Guinness. Sam was thankful for the spare bedroom now.

Sam ran lines of string backwards and forwards across the bedroom and carefully draped all the leaves over them. The success of the whole operation, he now felt, depended entirely on perfect drying. When he had hung the very last leaf he found himself pressed against the window on the opposite side of the room to the door. He was forced to drop down to his knees and crawl on all fours beneath those grotesque streamers, but he felt with satisfaction that it was a job well done.

Alice went up to inspect. "'Ow long d'ya think that lot'll stay up?" she asked with her large hands resting on her bulky hips. "It looks like Oldham Town Hall on Carnival day."

"I've been 'earin' things in t'night."

It had been hanging up in the back bedroom for about six weeks when the noises started. Grandma noticed them first, with the keen sense of hearing that she only admitted to when it was advantageous to do so.

"I've been 'earin' things," she said one day to Alice when she went into the kitchen to make herself some more tea.

"Yer shouldn't drink s'much tea," was the only reply she received. Alice was busy making scones.

"Hmm, scones again," the old woman muttered as she took her tea back into the parlour. "We used to 'ave rhubarb pie before that silly old fool cleared it all away for 'is blessed baccy."

But a few nights after, Alice heard noises too. Over and above the racket of Sam's snoring she heard a crackling and rustling.

"Sam," she said, sharply, digging the slumbering Sam in the ribs.

"Wake up, Sam, there's some'at in that back bedroom. There's some'at up, lad. Go an' see wha'ist."

"Ee, by gum," grumbled Sam, as he swung his legs out of his warm bed, "if ever a fella suffered."

Regardless of calendar dates or climate it was autumn in the Hardcastles' back bedroom.

As he stood in the doorway, Sam watched one of the leaves from the nearest line slowly overbalance and fall to the floor-boards where it lay, crackling a little, to be joined by yet another performing a similar symphony.

He knew what this meant. Alice wouldn't stand for things that go crackle in the night. Whether he liked it or not, stage three was upon him. The worst part was—it was still green. Dry, brittle, powdery, but still green.

The following evening, when Alice had gone to play bingo and Grandma was nodding off by the fire, Cyril presented his services as assistant tobacco-maker. Sam was extremely glad of this; Cyril wasn't exactly overloaded with brains but he was often useful as a labourer. Sam sent him upstairs to bring all the tobacco leaves down but Cyril returned with only a small handful.

"I can't carry it like this, Dad. As soon as I try to pick it all up, it crumbles to powder and slips through me fingers." As he spoke, fine green powder was falling, making a film of dust on the linoleum.

Sam had to think again.

Taking Alice's mixing bowl down from the large kitchen shelf, he said, "Come on, lad. We'll powder it all up there and put it in this."

Cyril looked extremely doubtful. "But that's our mam's mixin' bowl." He, at least, held Alice's pride and joy in due esteem.

"Ee, ne'er mind, lad. She'll never know."

They spread newspaper over the floor of the bedroom, took down all the remaining leaves from the lines and gathered them into a pile. It was not a difficult matter to reduce the lot to a bowlful of what looked extremely like sage but didn't smell anywhere near as appetising.

Downstairs in the kitchen they opened a bottle of beer each and stood gazing blankly at the bowl which they had placed, with great care, in the centre of the big square table.

"It needs mixin' wi' some'at," said Sam, without much enthusiasm.

"Aye, if yer put it in yer pipe like that it'd blow away," said Cyril with his usual insight.

"It needs some'at that wunna just blow up sudden, when it's lit."

"Aye."

"Don't just stand there sayin' 'Aye,' ya big dope."

Cyril screwed up his face in thought and then unscrewed it to reveal eyes which were just as blank as they had been before.

"'Ow about syrup?" he finally said.

Sam considered this for a time. Couldn't do much harm as long as he didn't put too much in.

"Aye, all right, lad. We'll 'ave a bash at that."

But they were out of luck. A thorough search of the cupboards produced no syrup. They were looking for the Tate and Lyle variety and Sam ignored Cyril when he asked if syrup of figs would do instead. Finally it was decided to settle for black treacle.

Black treacle isn't an easy commodity to control and Cyril let the tin slip a little bit too far.

As the black tar-looking substance oozed over his green tobacco, Sam swore loudly enough to wake Grandma and was just trying to scoop some of the treacle out when Alice walked in.

"My mixin' bowl!" She looked as though she was about to burst with rage.

Sam butted in, "Now, now, luv. It's all right. It's only black treacle. It won't do yer bowl any 'arm at all."

The little drama which followed resulted in Sam agreeing to smoke some then and there and if it wasn't any good, throw the remainder away.

"It should really ferment, luv."

He tried weakly to wriggle out of it but he didn't stand a chance.

Grandma roused herself and joined the little group round the kitchen table. If there were going to be any laughs, Grandma didn't want to miss them. As soon as she knew what was going on she went round to the sink and filled a bucket with water.

"What's that for, Gran?" Cyril looked puzzled.

"It's to put Guy Fawkes out," she rasped, "when he's finished tryin' to blow us all to kingdom come."

Sam took his old pipe in one hand and a soup spoon in the other. It was a messy business, filling the pipe with this original Hardcastle blend, but when he had managed to scrape all the overflow off the bowl he struck a match. Grandma held her bucket at the ready, Alice stood impassive and Cyril's jaw dropped a good two inches.

Sam struck another match, and another, and yet another. Three full boxes had been used before the smoke began to filter in and out of poor Sam.

"What's it like, Dad?" Cyril was by this time quite excited.

"Don't interrupt yer father when 'e's smokin'. If it goes out 'e'll never get it lit again," said Alice as Sam began to turn a strange shade of yellow. He began coughing too and his eyes crossed.

Slowly Sam sank down into a chair and the coughing got even worse.

Grandma skipped up to him, snatched the pipe from his hands and dropped it into the bucket of water.

"I told yer we'd need that bucket," she said, her teeth rattling as she chuckled. "Now let's 'ave a cup o' tea, Alice. Aye, we'll 'appen get rhubarb pie again, too."

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ROAD TO

Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens unravel another security tangle in a new story specially written for Argosy

by

MICHAEL GILBERT

EVERYONE in Lamperdown knew that Mr. Behrens, who lived with his aunt at the Old Rectory and kept bees, and Mr. Calder, who lived in a cottage on the hill-top outside the village and was the owner of a deer hound called Rasselas, were the closest of close friends. They knew, too, that there was something out of the ordinary about both of them.

Both had a habit of disappearing. When Mr. Calder went he left the great dog in charge of the cottage; and Mr. Behrens would plod up the hill once a day, to talk to the dog and see to his requirements. If both men happened to be away at the same time, Rasselas would be brought down to the Old Rectory where, according to Flossie, who did for the Behrenses, he would sit for hour after hour in one red plush armchair, staring silently at Mr. Behrens' aunt in the other.

There were other things. There was known to be a buried telephone-line connecting the Old Rectory and the cottage; both houses had an elaborate system of burglar alarms; and Mr. Calder's cottage, according to Ken who had helped to build it, had steel plates inside the window shutters.

The villagers knew all this and, being countrymen, talked very little about it, except occasionally among themselves, towards closing-time. To strangers, of course, they said nothing.

That fine autumn morning Rasselas was lying, chin on ground, watching Mr. Calder creosote the sharp end of a wooden spile. He sat up suddenly and rumbled out a warning.

"It's only Arthur," said Mr. Calder. "We know him."

DAMASCUS

The dog subsided with a windy sigh.

Arthur was Mr. Calder's nearest neighbour. He lived in a converted railway-carriage in the company of a cat and two owls, and worked in the woods which cap the North Downs from Wrotham Hill to the Medway—Brimstone Wood, Molehill Wood, Long Gorse Shaw, Whitehorse Wood, Tom Lofts Wood and Leg of Mutton Wood. It was a very old part of the country and like all old things, it was full of ghosts. Mr. Calder could not see them, but he knew they were there. Sometimes, when he was walking with Rasselas in the woods, the dog would stop, cock his head on one side and rumble deep in his throat, his yellow eyes speculative as he followed some shape flitting down the ride ahead of them.

"Good morning, Arthur," said Mr. Calder.

"Working, I see," said Arthur. He was a small, thick man, of great strength, said to have an irresistible attraction for women.

"The old fence is on its last legs. I'm putting this in until I can get it done properly."

Arthur examined the spile with an expert eye and said, "Chestnut. That should hold her for a season. Oak'd be better. You working too hard to come and look at something I found?"

"Never too busy for that," said Mr. Calder.

"Let's go in your car, it'll be quicker," said Arthur. "Bring a torch, too."

Half a mile along a rutted track they left the car, climbed a gate and walked down a broad ride, forking off it on to a smaller one. After a few minutes the trees thinned, and Mr. Calder saw that they were coming to a clearing where wooding had been going on. The trunks had been dragged away and the slope was a litter of scattered cord-wood.

"These big contractors," said Arthur. "They've got no idea. They come and cut down the trees, and lug 'em off, and think they've finished the job. Then I have to clear it up. Stack the cord-wood. Pull out the stumps where they're an obstruction to traffic."

What traffic had passed, or would ever pass again through the heart of this secret place, Mr. Calder could hardly imagine. But he saw that the workmen had cleared a rough path which followed the contour of the hill and disappeared down the other side, presumably joining the track they had come by somewhere down in the valley. At that moment the ground was a mess of tractor marks and turned earth. In a year the

raw places would be skimmed over with grass and nettles and bluebells and kingcups and wild garlic. In five years there would be no trace of the intruders.

"In the old days," said Arthur, "we done it with horses. Now we do it with machinery. I'm not saying it isn't quicker and handier, but it don't seem altogether right." He nodded at his bulldozer, askew on the side of a hummock. Rasselas went over and sneered at it, disapproving of the oily smell.

"I was shifting this stump," said Arthur, "when the old cow slipped and came down sideways. She hit t'other tree a proper dunt. I thought I bitched up the works, but all I done was shift the tree a piece. See?"

Mr. Calder walked across to look. The tree which Arthur had hit was no more than a hollow ring of elm, very old and less than three feet high. His first thought was that it was curious that a heavy bulldozer crashing down on to it from above should not have shattered its frail shell altogether.

"Ah! You have a look inside," said Arthur.

The interior of the stump was solid concrete.

"Why on earth," said Mr. Calder, "would anyone bother—?"

"Just have a look at this."

The stump was at a curious angle, half uprooted, so that one side lay much higher than the other.

"When I hit it," said Arthur, "I felt something give. Truth to tell, I thought I'd cracked her shaft. Then I took another look. See?"

Mr. Calder looked. And he saw.

The whole block—wooden ring, cement centre and all—had been pierced by an iron bar. The end of it was visible, thick with rust, sticking out of the broken earth. He scraped away the soil with his fingers and presently found the U-shaped socket he was looking for. He sat back on his heels and stared at Arthur, who stared back, solemn as one of his own owls.

"Someone," said Mr. Calder, slowly, "—God knows why—took the trouble to cut out this tree stump and stick a damned great iron bar right through the middle of it, fixed to open on a pivot."

"It would have been Dan Owtram who fixed the bar for 'em, I don't doubt," said Arthur. "He's been dead ten years now."

"Who'd Dan fix it for?"

"Why, for the military."

"I see," said Mr. Calder. It was beginning to make a little more sense.

"You'll see when you get inside."

"Is there something inside?"

"Surely," said Arthur. "I wouldn't bring you out all this way just to look at an old tree stump, now would I? Come around here."

Mr. Calder moved round to the far side and saw, for the first time, that when the stump had shifted it had left a gap on the underside. It was not much bigger than a badger's earth.

"Are you suggesting I go down *that*?"

"It's not so bad, once you're in," said Arthur.

The entrance sloped down at about forty-five degrees and was only really narrow at the start, where the earth had caved in. After a short slide Mr. Calder's feet touched the top of a ladder. It was a long ladder. He counted twenty rungs before his feet were on firm ground. He got out his torch and switched it on.

He was in a fair-sized chamber, cut out of the chalk. He saw two recesses, each containing a spring bed on a wooden frame; two or three empty packing-cases, up-ended as table and seats; a wooden cupboard, several racks, and a heap of disintegrating blankets. The place smelled of lime and dampness and, very faintly, of something else.

A scrabbling noise announced the arrival of Arthur.

"Like something outer one of them last war films," he said.

"*Journey's End*!" said Mr. Calder. "All it needs is a candle in an empty beer-bottle and a couple of gas-masks hanging up on the wall."

"It was journey's end for him all right." Arthur jerked his head towards the far corner, and Mr. Calder swung his torch round.

The first thing he saw was a pair of boots: then the mildewy remains of a pair of flannel trousers, through gaps in which the leg bones showed white. The man was lying on his back. He could hardly have fallen like that; it was not a natural position. Someone had taken the trouble to straighten the legs and fold the arms over the chest after death.

The light from Mr. Calder's torch moved upwards to the head, where it stayed for a long minute. Then he straightened up. "I don't think you'd better say much about this. Not for the moment."

"That hole in his forehead," said Arthur. "It's a bullet hole, ennit?"

"Yes. The bullet went through the middle of his forehead and out at the back. There's a second hole there."

"I guessed it was more up your street than mine," said Arthur. "What'll we do? Tell the police?"

"We'll have to tell them some time. Just for the moment, do you think you could cover the hole up? Put some sticks and turf across?"

"I could dó that all right. 'T won't really be necessary, though. Now the wooding's finished you won't get anyone else through here. It's all preserved. The people who do the shooting, they stay on the outside of the covers."

"One of them didn't," said Mr. Calder, looking down at the floor and showing his teeth in a grin.

Mr. Behrens edged his way through the crowd in the drawing room of Colonel Mark Bessendine's Chatham quarters. He wanted to look at one of the photographs on the mantelpiece.

"That's the *Otrango*," said a girl near his left elbow. "It was Grandfather's ship. He proposed to Granny in the Red Sea. On the deck-tennis court, actually. Romantic, don't you think?"

Mr. Behrens removed his gaze from the photograph to study his informant. She had brown hair and a friendly face and was just leaving the puppy-fat stage. Fifteen or sixteen, he guessed. "You must be Julia Bessendine," he said.

"And you're Mr. Behrens. Daddy says you're doing something very clever in our workshops. Of course, he wouldn't say what."

"That was his natural discretion," said Mr. Behrens. "As a matter of fact, it isn't hush-hush at all. I'm writing a paper for the Molecular Society on Underwater Torque Reactions and the Navy offered to lend me its big test tank."

"Gracious!" said Julia.

Colonel Bessendine surged across.

"Julia, you're in dereliction of your duties. I can see that Mr. Behrens' glass is empty."

"Excellent sherry," said Mr. Behrens.

"Tradition," said Colonel Bessendine, "associates the Navy with rum. In fact, the two drinks that it really understands are gin and sherry. I hope our technical people are looking after you?"

"The Navy have been helpfulness personified. It's been particularly convenient for me, being allowed to do this work at Chatham. Only twenty minutes' run from Lamperdown, you see."

Colonel Bessendine said, "My last station was Devonport. A ghastly place. When I was posted back here I felt I was coming home. The whole of my youth is tied up with this part of the country. I was born and bred not far from Tilbury and I went to school at Rochester."

His face, thought Mr. Behrens, was like a waxwork. A clever waxwork, but one which you could never quite mistake for human flesh. Only the eyes were truly alive.

"I sometimes spent a holiday down here when I was a boy," said Mr. Behrens. "My aunt and uncle—he's dead now—bought the Old Rectory at Lamperdown after the First World War. Thank you, my dear, that was very nicely managed." This was to Julia, who had fought her way back to him with most of the sherry still in the glass. "In those days your school," he said to the girl, "was a private house. One of the great houses of the county."

"It must have been totally impracticable," said Julia Bessendine severely. "Fancy trying to *live* in it. What sort of staff did it need to keep it up?"

"They scraped along with twenty or thirty indoor servants, a few dozen gardeners and gamekeepers, and a cricket pro."

"Daddy told me that when he was a boy he used to walk out from school, on half-holidays, and watch cricket on their private cricket ground. That's right, isn't it Daddy?"

"That's right, my dear. I think, Julia—"

"He used to crawl up alongside the hedge from the railway and squeeze through a gap in the iron railings at the top and lie in the bushes. And once the old lord walked across and found him and instead of booting him out, he gave him money to buy sweets with."

"Major Furlong looks as if he could do with another drink," said Colonel Bessendine.

"Colonel Bessendine's father," said Mr. Behrens to Mr. Calder later that evening, "came from New Zealand. He ran away to sea at the age of thirteen, and got himself a job with the Anzac Shipping Line. He rose to be head purser on their biggest ship, the *Otrango*. Then he married. An Irish colleen, I believe. Her father was a landowner from Cork. That part of the story's a bit obscure, because her family promptly disowned her. They didn't approve of the marriage at all. They were poor but proud. Old Bessendine had the drawback of being twice as rich as they were."

"Rich? A purser?"

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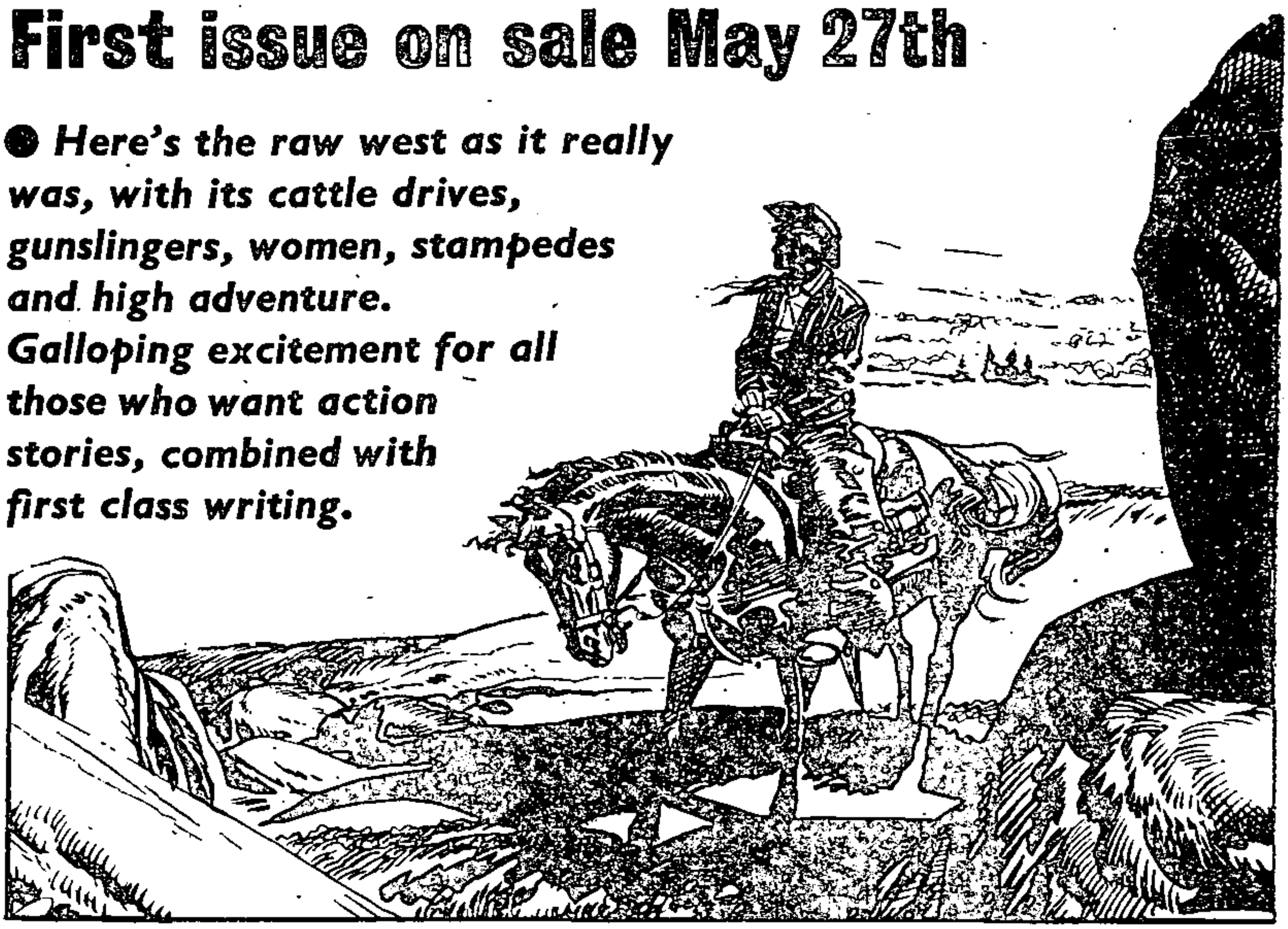

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"He was a shrewd old boy. He bought up land in Tilbury and Grays and leased it to builders. When he died, his estate was declared for probate at £85,000. I expect it was really worth a lot more. His three sons were all well-educated and well-behaved. It was the sort of home where the boys called their father 'sir,' and got up when he came into the room."

"We could do with more homes like that," said Mr. Calder. "Gone much too far the other way. What happened to the other two sons?"

"Both dead. The eldest went into the Army: he was killed at Dunkirk. The second boy was a Flight Lieutenant. He was shot down over Germany, picked up and put into a prison camp. He was involved in some sort of trouble there. Shot, trying to escape."

"Bad luck," said Mr. Calder. He was working something out with paper and pencil. "Go away." This was to Rasselas, who had his paws on the table and was trying to help him. "What happened to young Mark?"

"Mark was in the Marines. He was blown sky high in the autumn of 1940—the first heavy raid on Gravesend and Tilbury."

"But I gather he came down in one piece."

"Just about. He was in hospital for six months. The plastic surgeons did a wonderful job on his face. The only thing they couldn't put back was the animation."

"Since you've dug up such a lot of his family history, do I gather that he's in some sort of a spot?"

"He's in a spot all right," said Mr. Behrens. "He's been spying for the Russians for a long time and we've just tumbled to it."

"You're sure?"

"I'm afraid there's no doubt about it at all. Fortescue has had him under observation for the last three months."

"Why hasn't he been put away?"

"The stuff he's passing out is important, but it's not vital. Bessendine isn't a scientist. He's held security and administrative jobs in different Naval stations, so he's been able to give details of the progress and success of various jobs—where a project has run smoothly, or where it got behind time, or flopped. There's nothing the other side likes more than a flop."

"How does he get the information out?"

"That's exactly what I'm trying to find out. It's some sort of post-office system, no doubt. When we've sorted that out, we'll pull him in."

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"Has he got any family?"

"A standard pattern Army-type wife. And a rather nice daughter."

"It's the family who suffer in these cases," said Mr. Calder. He scratched Rasselas' tufted head, and the big dog yawned. "By the way, *we* had rather an interesting day, too. We found a body."

He told Mr. Behrens about this, and Mr. Behrens said, "What are you going to do about it?"

"I've telephoned Fortescue. He was quite interested. He's put me on to a Colonel Cawston, who was in charge of Irregular Forces in this area in 1940. He thinks he might be able to help us."

Colonel Cawston's room was littered with catalogues, feeding charts, invoices, paid bills and unpaid bills, seed samples, gift calendars, local newspapers, boxes of cartridges, and buff forms from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Calder said, "It's really very good of you to spare the time to talk to me, Colonel. You're a pretty busy man, I can see that."

"We shall get on famously," said the old man, "if you'll remember two things. The first is that I'm deaf in my left ear. The second, that I'm no longer a colonel. I stopped being that in 1945."

"Both points shall be borne in mind," said Mr. Calder, easing himself round on to his host's right-hand side.

"Fortescue told me you were coming. If that old bandit's involved, I suppose it's security stuff?"

"I'm not at all sure," said Mr. Calder. "I'd better tell you about it..."

"Interesting," said the old man. "Fascinating, in fact."

He went across to a big corner cupboard, dug into its cluttered interior and surfaced with two faded khaki-coloured canvas folders, which he laid on the table. From one of them he turned out a thick wad of papers; from the other a set of quarter- and one-inch military maps.

"I kept all this stuff," he said. "At one time, I was thinking of writing a history of special operations during the first two years of the war. I never got round to it, though. Too much like hard work." He unfolded the maps, and smoothed out the papers with his bent and arthritic fingers.

"Fortescue told me," said Mr. Calder, "that you were in charge of what he called 'Stay-put Parties.'"

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"It was really a very sound idea," said the old man. His frosty blue eyes sparkled for a moment, with the light of unfought battles. "We did the same thing in Burma. When you knew that you might have to retreat, you dug-in small resistance groups, with arms and food, and wireless sets. They'd let themselves be overrun, you see, and operate behind the enemy lines. We had a couple of dozen posts like that in Kent and Sussex. The one you found would have been—Whitehorse Wood you said?—here it is, Post Six. That was a very good one. They converted an existing dene-hole—you know what a dene-hole is?"

"As far as I can gather," said Mr. Calder, "the original inhabitants of this part of the country dug them to hide in when *they* were overrun by the Angles and Saxons and such. A sort of pre-Aryan Stay-put Party."

"Never thought of it that way." The old man chuckled. "You're quite right, of course. That's exactly what it was. Now then. Post Six. We had three men in each—an officer and two NCOs." He ran his gnarled finger up the paper in front of him. "Sergeant Brewer. A fine chap that. Killed in North Africa. Corporal Stubbs. He's dead, too. Killed in a motor crash, a week after VE Day. So your unknown corpse couldn't be either of *them*."

There was a splendid inevitability about it all, thought Mr. Calder. It was like the unfolding of a Greek tragedy; or the final chord of a well-built symphony. You waited for it. You knew it was coming. But you were still surprised when it did.

"Bessendine," said the old man. "Lieutenant Mark Bessendine. Perhaps the most tragic of the lot, really. He was a natural choice for our work. Spoke Spanish, French and German. Young and fit. Front-line experience with the Reds in Spain."

"What exactly happened to him?"

"It was the first week in November 1940. Our masters in Whitehall had concluded that the invasion wasn't on. I was told to seal up all my posts and send the men back to their units. I remember sending Mark out that afternoon to Post Six—it hadn't been occupied for some weeks—told him to bring back any loose stores. That was the last time I saw him—in the flesh, as you might say. You heard what happened?"

"He got caught in the German blitz on Tilbury and Gravesend."

"That's right. Must have been actually on his way back to

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our HQ. The explosion picked him up and pushed him through a plate-glass window. He was damned lucky to be alive at all. Next time I saw him he was swaddled up like a mummy. Couldn't talk or move."

"Did you see him again?"

"I was posted abroad in the spring. Spent the rest of the war in Africa and Italy... Now you happen to mention it, though, I thought I did bump into him once—at the big Reception Centre at Calais. I went through there on my way home in 1945."

"Did he recognise you?"

"It was a long time ago. I can't really remember." The old man looked up sharply. "Is it important?"

"It might be," said Mr. Calder.

"If you're selling anything," said the old lady to Mr. Behrens, "you're out of luck."

"I am neither selling nor buying," said Mr. Behrens.

"And if you're the new curate, I'd better warn you that I'm a Baptist."

"I'm a practising agnostic."

The old lady looked at him curiously, and then said, "Whatever it is you want to talk about, we shall be more comfortable inside, shan't we?"

She led the way across the hall, narrow and bare as a coffin, into a surprisingly bright and cheerful sitting room.

"You don't look to me," she said, "like the sort of man who knocks old ladies on the head and grabs their life's savings. I keep mine in the bank, such as they are."

"I must confess to you," said Mr. Behrens, "that I'm probably wasting your time. I'm in Tilbury on a sentimental errand. I spent a year of the war in an Air Force prison camp in Germany. One of my greatest friends there was Jeremy Bessendine. He was a lot younger than I was, of course, but we had a common interest in bees."

"I don't know what you were doing up in an airplane, at your time of life. I expect you dyed your hair. People used to do that in the 1914 war. I'm sorry, I interrupted you, Mr. —?"

"Behrens."

"My name's Galloway. You said Jeremy Bessendine."

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"I knew *all* the Bessendines. Father and mother, and all three sons. The mother was the sweetest thing, from the bogs

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A FLEETWAY MAGAZINE

of Ireland. The father, well, let's be charitable and say he was old-fashioned. Their house was on the other side of the road to mine. There's nothing left of it now. Can you see? Not a stick nor a stone."

Mr. Behrens looked out of the window. The opposite side of the road was an open space containing one row of prefabricated huts.

"Terrible things," said Mrs. Galloway. "They put them up after the war as a temporary measure. Temporary!"

"So that's where the Bessendines' house was," said Mr. Behrens, sadly. "Jeremy often described it to me. He was so looking forward to living in it again when the war was over."

"Jeremy was my favourite," said Mrs. Galloway. "I'll admit I cried when I heard he'd been killed. Trying to escape, they said."

She looked back twenty-five years, and sighed at what she saw. "If we're going to be sentimental," she said, "we shall do it better over a cup of tea. The kettle's on the boil." She went out into the kitchen but left the door open, so that she could continue to talk.

"John, the eldest, I never knew well. He went straight into the Army. He was killed early on. The youngest was Mark. He was a wild character, if you like."

"Wild? In what way?" said Mr. Behrens.

Mrs. Galloway arranged the teapot, cups and milk jug on a tray and collected her thoughts. Then she said, "He was a rebel. Strong or weak?"

"Just as it comes," said Mr. Behrens.

"His two brothers, they accepted the discipline at home. Mark didn't. Jeremy told me that when Mark ran away from school—the second time—and his father tried to send him back, they had a real set-to, the father shouting, the boy screaming. That was when he went off to Spain to fight for the Reds. Milk and sugar?"

"Both," said Mr. Behrens. He thought of Mark Bessendine as he had seen him two days before. An ultra-correct, poker-backed, poker-faced regular soldier. How deep had the rebel been buried?

"He's quite a different sort of person now," he said.

"Of course, he would be," said Mrs. Galloway. "You can't be blown to bits and put together again and still be the same person, can you?"

"Why, no," said Mr. Behrens. "I suppose you can't."

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"I felt very strange myself for a week or so, after it happened. And *I* was only blown across the kitchen and cracked my head on the stove."

"You remember that raid, then?"

"I most certainly do. It must have been about five o'clock. Just getting dark, and a bit misty. They came in low, and the next moment—*crump, bump*—we were right in the middle of it. It was the first raid we'd had—and the worst. You could hear the bombs coming closer and closer. I thought, I wish I'd stayed in Saffron Walden—where I'd been evacuated, you see—I'm for it now, I thought. And it's all my own fault for coming back like the posters told me not to. And the next moment I was lying on the floor, with my head against the stove, and a lot of warm red stuff running over my face. It was tomato soup."

"And that was the bomb that destroyed the Bessendines' house—and killed old Mr. and Mrs. Bessendine?"

"That's right. And it was the same raid that nearly killed Mark. My goodness!"

The last exclamation was nothing to do with what had gone before. Mrs. Galloway was staring at Mr. Behrens. Her face had gone pale. She said, "Jeremy! I've just remembered! When it happened they sent him home, on compassionate leave. He *knew* his house had been blown up. Why would he tell you he was looking forward to living in it after the war—when he must have known it wasn't there?"

Mr. Behrens could think of nothing to say.

"You've been lying, haven't you? Who are you? What's it all about?"

Mr. Behrens put down his teacup, and said, gently, "I'm sorry I had to tell you a lot of lies, Mrs. Galloway. Please don't worry about it too much. I promise you that nothing you told me is going to hurt anyone."

The old lady gulped down her own tea. The colour came back slowly to her cheeks. She said, "Whatever it is, I don't want to know about it." She stared out of the window at the place where a big house had once stood, inhabited by a bullying father and a sweet Irish mother, and three boys. She said, "It's all dead and done with, anyway."

As Mr. Behrens drove home in the dusk, his tyres on the road hummed the words back at him. *Dead and done with. Dead and done with.*

Mr. Fortescue, who was the manager of the Westminster

branch of the London and Home Counties Bank, and a number of other things besides, glared across his broad mahogany desk at Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens and said, "I have never encountered such an irritating and frustrating case."

He made it sound as if they, and not the facts, were the cause of his irritation.

Mr. Behrens said, "I don't think people quite realise how heavily the scales are weighted in favour of a spy who's learned his job and keeps his head. All the stuff that Colonel Bessendine is passing out is stuff he's officially entitled to know. Progress of existing work, projects for new work, personnel to be employed, security arrangements. It all comes into his field. Suppose he *does* keep notes of it. Suppose we searched his house, found those notes in his safe. Would it prove anything?"

"Of course it wouldn't," said Mr. Fortescue, sourly. "That's why you've got to catch him actually handing it over. I've had three men—apart from you—watching him for months. He behaves normally—goes up to Town once or twice a week, goes to the cinema with his family, goes to local drink parties, has his friends in to dinner. All absolutely above suspicion."

"Quite so," said Mr. Behrens. "He goes up to London in the morning rush-hour. He gets into a crowded Underground train. Your man can't get too close to him. Bessendine's wedged up against another man who happens to be carrying a briefcase identical with his own . . ."

"Do you think that's how it's done?"

"I've no idea," said Mr. Behrens. "But I wager I could invent half-a-dozen other methods just as simple and just as impossible to detect."

Mr. Calder said, "When exactly did Mark Bessendine start betraying his country's secrets to the Russians?"

"We can't be absolutely certain. But it's been going on for a very long time. Back to the Cold War which nearly turned into a Hot War—1947, perhaps."

"Not before that?"

"Perhaps you had forgotten," said Mr. Fortescue, "that until 1945 the Russians were on our side."

"I wondered," said Mr. Calder, "if before that he might have been spying for the Germans. Have you looked at the 'Hessel' file lately?"

Both Mr. Fortescue and Mr. Behrens stared at Mr. Calder, who looked blandly back at them.

Mr. Behrens said, "We never found out who Hessel was, did we? He was just a code name to us."

"But the Russians found out," said Mr. Calder. "The first thing they did when they got to Berlin was to grab all Admiral Canaris' records. If they found the Hessel dossier there—if they found out that he had been posing successfully for more than four years as an officer in the Royal Marines—"

"Posing?" said Mr. Fortescue, sharply.

"It occurred to me as a possibility."

"If Hessel is posing as Bessendine, where's Bessendine?" said Mr. Fortescue.

"At the bottom of a pre-Aryan chalk pit in Whitehorse Wood, above Lamperdown," said Mr. Calder, "with a bullet through his head."

Mr. Fortescue looked at Mr. Behrens, who said, "Yes, it's possible. I had thought of that."

"Lieutenant Mark Bessendine," said Mr. Calder, slowly, as if he was seeing it all as he spoke, "set off alone one November afternoon, with orders to close down and seal up Post Six. He'd have been dressed in battledress and carrying his Army pay book and identity papers with him, because in 1940 everyone did that. As he was climbing out of the post, he heard, or saw, a strange figure. A civilian, lurking in the woods, where no civilian should have been. He challenged him. And the answer was a bullet, from Hessel's gun. Hessel had landed that day, or the day before, on the South Coast, from a submarine. Most of the spies who were landed that autumn lasted less than a week. Right?"

"They were a poor bunch," said Mr. Fortescue. "Badly equipped, and with the feeblest cover stories. I sometimes wondered if they were people Canaris wanted to get rid of."

"Exactly," said Mr. Calder. "But Hessel was a tougher proposition. He spoke excellent English—his mother was English, and he'd been to an English public school. And here was a God-sent chance to improve his equipment and cover. Bessendine was the same size and build. All he had to do was to change clothes and instead of being a phoney civilian, liable to be questioned by the first constable he met, he was a properly dressed, fully documented Army officer. Provided he kept on the move, he could go anywhere in England. No-one would question him. It wasn't the sort of cover that would last for ever. But that didn't matter. His pick-up was probably fixed for four weeks ahead—in the next no-moon period. So he put on Bessendine's uniform, and started out

for Gravesend. Not, I need hardly say, with any intention of going back to Headquarters. All he wanted to do was to catch a train to London."

"But the *Luftwaffe* caught him."

"They did indeed," said Mr. Calder. "They caught him—and they set him free. Free of all possible suspicion. When he came out of that hospital, six months later, he had a new face. More He was a new man. If anyone asked him anything about his past, all he had to say was—"Oh, that was before I got blown up. I don't remember very much about that."

"But surely," said Mr. Fortescue, "it wasn't quite as easy as that. Bessendine's family—" He stopped.

"You've seen it too, haven't you?" said Mr. Calder. "He had no family. No-one at all. One brother was dead, the other was in a prison camp in Germany. I wonder if it was a pure coincidence that he should later have been shot when trying to escape. Or did Himmler send a secret instruction to the camp authorities? Maybe it was just another bit of luck. Like Mark's parents being killed in the same raid. His mother's family lived in Ireland—and had disowned her. His father's family—if it existed—was in New Zealand. Mark Bessendine was completely and absolutely alone."

"The first Hessel messages went out to Germany at the end of 1941," said Mr. Fortescue. "How did he manage to send them?"

"No difficulty there," said Mr. Calder. "The German short-wave transmitters were very efficient. You only had to renew the batteries. He'd have buried his in the wood. He only had to dig it up again. He had all the call signals and codes."

Mr. Behrens had listened to this in silence, with a half smile on his face.

Now he cleared his throat and said, "If this—um—ingenious theory is true, it does—um—suggest a way of drawing out the gentleman concerned, does it not . . .?"

"I was very interested when you told me about this dene-hole," said Colonel Bessendine to Mr. Behrens. "I had heard about them as a boy, of course, but I've never actually seen one."

"I hope we shan't be too late," said Mr. Behrens. "It'll be dark in an hour. You'd better park your car here. We'll have to do the rest of the trip on foot."

"I'm sorry I was late," said Colonel Bessendine. "I had a job I had to finish before I go off tomorrow."

"Off?"

"A short holiday. I'm taking my wife and daughter to France."

"I envy you," said Mr. Behrens. "Over the stile here and straight up the hill. I hope I can find it from this side. When I came here before I approached it from the other side. Fork right here, I think."

They moved up through the silent woods, each occupied with his own, very different, thoughts.

Mr. Behrens said, "I'm sure this was the clearing. Look. You can see the marks of the workmen's tractors. And this —I think—was the stump."

He stopped, and kicked at the foot of the elm bole. The loose, covering pieces of turf on sticks, laid there by Arthur, collapsed, showing the dark entrance.

"Good lord!" said Colonel Bessendine. He was standing, hands in raincoat pockets, shoulders hunched. "Don't tell me that people used to live in a place like that?"

"It's quite snug inside."

"Inside? You mean you've actually been inside it?" He shifted his weight so that it rested on his left foot and his right hand came out of his pocket and hung loose.

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Behrens. "I found the body, too."

There was a long silence. That's the advantage of having a false face, thought Mr. Behrens. It's unfair. You can do your thinking behind it, and no-one can watch you actually doing it.

The lips cracked into a smile.

"You're an odd card," said Colonel Bessendine. "Did you bring me all the way here to tell me that?"

"I brought you here," said Mr. Behrens, "so that you could explain one or two things that have been puzzling me." He had seated himself on the thick side of the stump. "For instance, you must have known about this hide-out, since you and Sergeant Brewer and Corporal Stubbs built it in 1940. Why didn't you tell me that when I started describing it to you?"

"I wasn't quite sure then," said Colonel Bessendine. "I wanted to make sure."

As he spoke his right hand moved with a smooth, unhurried gesture into the open front of his coat and out again. It was now holding a flat, blue-black weapon which Mr. Behrens,

who was a connoisseur in such matters, recognised as a *Zyanidpistole* or cyanide gun.

"Where did they teach you that draw?" he said. "In the *Marineamt*?"

For the first time he thought that the colonel was genuinely surprised. His face still revealed nothing, but there was a note of curiosity in his voice.

"I learned in Spain to carry a gun under my arm and draw it quickly," he said. "There were quite a few occasions on which you had to shoot people before they shot you. Your own side, sometimes. It was rather a confused war, in some ways."

"I imagine so," said Mr. Behrens. He was sitting like a Buddha in the third attitude of repose, his feet crossed, the palms of his hands pressed flat, one on each knee. "I only mentioned it because some of my colleagues had a theory that you were a German agent called Hessel."

In the colonel's eyes a glint of genuine amusement appeared for a moment, like a face at a window, and ducked out of sight again.

"I gather that you were not convinced by this theory?"

"As a matter of fact, I wasn't."

"Oh. Why?"

"I remembered what your daughter told me. That you used to crawl up alongside a hedge running from the railway line to the private cricket ground at the big house. I went along and had a look. You couldn't crawl up along the hedge now. It's too overgrown. But there *is* a place at the top—it's hidden by the hedge, and I scratched myself damnably getting into it—where two bars are bent apart. A boy could have got through them easily."

"You're very thorough," said the colonel. "Is there anything you *haven't* found out about me?"

"I would be interested to know exactly when you started betraying your country. And why. Did you mean to do it all along and falling in with Hessel and killing him gave you an opportunity—the wireless and the codes and the call signs—?"

"I can clearly see," said the colonel, "that you have never been blown up. Really blown to pieces, I mean. If you had been, you'd know that it's quite impossible to predict what sort of man will come down again. You can be turned inside-out, or upside-down. You can be born again. Things you didn't know were inside you can be shaken to the top."

"Saul becoming Paul, on the road to Damascus."

"You *are* an intelligent man," said the colonel. "It's a pleasure to talk to you. The analogy had not occurred to me, but it is perfectly apt. My father was a great man for disciplining youth, for regimentation, and the New Order. Because he was my father, I rebelled against it. That's natural enough. Because I rebelled against it, I fought for the Russians against the Germans in Spain. I saw how those young Nazis behaved. It was simply a rehearsal for them, you know. A rehearsal for the struggle they had dedicated their lives to. A knightly vigil, if you like. I saw them fight, and I saw them die. Any that were captured were usually tortured. I tortured them myself. If you torture a man and fail to break him, it becomes like a love affair. Did you know that?"

"I, too, have read the works of the Marquis de Sade," said Mr. Behrens. "Go on."

"When I lay in hospital in the darkness with my eyes bandaged, my hands strapped to my side, coming slowly back to life, I had the strangest feeling. I *was* Hessel. I *was* the man I had left lying in the darkness at the bottom of that pit. I had closed his eyes and folded his hands, and now I was him. His work was my work. Where he had left it off, I would take it up. My father had been right and Hitler had been right and I had been wrong. And now I had been shown a way to repair the mistakes and follies of my former life. Does that sound mad to you?"

"Quite mad," said Mr. Behrens. "But I find it easier to believe than the rival theory—that the accident of having a new face enabled you to fool everyone for twenty-five years. You may have had no family, but there were school friends and Army friends and neighbours. But I interrupt you. When you got out of hospital and decided to carry on Hessel's work, I suppose you used his wireless set and his codes?"

"Until the end of the war, yes. Then I destroyed them. When I was forced to work for the Russians I began to use other methods. I'm afraid I can't discuss them, even with you. They involve too many other people."

In spite of the peril of his position, Mr. Behrens could not suppress a feeling of deep satisfaction. Not many of his plans had worked out so exactly. Colonel Bessendine was not a man given to confidences. A mixture of carefully-devised forces were now driving him to talk. The time and the place; the fact that Mr. Behrens had established a certain intellectual

supremacy over him; the fact that he must have been unable, for so many years, to speak freely to anyone; the fact that silence was no longer important, since he had made up his mind to liquidate his audience. On this last point, Mr. Behrens was under no illusions. Colonel Bessendine was on his way out. France was only the first station on a line which led to Eastern Germany and Moscow.

"One thing puzzles me," said the colonel, breaking into his thoughts. "During all the time we have been talking here—and I cannot tell you how much I have enjoyed our conversation—I couldn't help noticing that you have hardly moved. Your hands, for instance, have been lying cupped, one on each knee. When a fly annoyed you just now, instead of raising your hand to brush it off you shook your head violently."

Mr. Behrens said, raising his voice a little, "If I were to lift my right hand a very well-trained dog, who has been approaching you quietly from the rear whilst we were talking, would have jumped for your throat."

The colonel smiled. "Your imagination does you credit. What happens if you lift your left hand? Does a genie appear from a bottle and carry me off?"

"If I raise my left hand," said Mr. Behrens, "you will be shot dead."

And so saying, he raised it.

The two men and the big dog stared down at the crumpled body. Rasselas sniffed at it, once, and turned away. It was carrion and no longer interesting.

"I'd have liked to try to pull him down alive," said Mr. Behrens. "But with that foul weapon in his hand, I daren't chance it."

"It will solve a lot of Mr. Fortescue's problems," said Mr. Calder. He was unscrewing the telescopic sight from the rifle he was carrying.

"We'll put him down beside Hessel. I've brought two crowbars along with me. We ought to be able to shift the stump back into its original position. With any luck, they'll lie there, undisturbed, for a very long time."

Side by side in the dark earth, thought Mr. Behrens. Until the Day of Judgment, when all hearts are opened and all thoughts known.

"We'd better hurry, too," said Mr. Calder. "It's getting dark, and I want to get back in time for tea."

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GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

AUTHOR TURNS REVIEWER AND SAYS

'Let's tackle the new books from a different angle'

THERE seems to be some doubt whether the duty of a reviewer is to entertain you by his own erudition or to tell you what a book is about and whether you will enjoy it. As a reader, I am prepared to accept either; but now, hoisted into the hot seat of pundit and far from happy there, I cannot decide between them. Nor do I much want to. I do not have that kind of erudition, and I cannot presume to tell a complete stranger what he will like.

So let's tackle books from a different angle and see if it works—not laying down the law about why you ought to read the author's work, but why he or she thinks you should. After all, the writer would not have gone through the infernal, lonely grind of producing a book unless he hoped for readers.

Leslie Fiedler, now. I cannot get what his answer is. Obviously he has a major talent as a satirist. In his new book, *The Second Stone,* here and there are touches of Swiftian savagery and of fantastic humour. The target is brought down in flames. But what an obscure, wretched little target, composed of would-be writers, an unbelievable fake of a swami, an excitable self-conscious negro, a fat slob of an Italian intellectual! Though men in or about their thirties, they talk and think like students of eighteen. In Greenwich Village they might be recognisable as human beings—but not to us and, probably, not to American readers either.

This set of monstrous curiosities arrives in Rome for an

The Second Stone

International Conference on Love, financed by a famous family-planning manufacturer who employs an Italian sculptor to make visuals of the products. What a joyous idea, you will shout! Have you yet discovered an American who writes with the gaiety and wit of the French?

No, alas! I can only offer you the usual American puritan to whom all bodily functions are sordid or painfully neutral. Even the detailed exploration of the mistress by the lover is cold. No doubt deliberately. It is hard to keep a steady course between bad poetry on one hand and obscenity on the other. Only Nabokov can be luscious without being erotic. But Nabokov is no puritan. He rejoices in the flesh.

But I must tell you what it's about. Easy. The swami has a pregnant wife. She pukes on Page 1, so that we intellectuals who might have been put off by the sub-title of *A Love Story,* shall know exactly where we are. He hands her over to an old school friend, a resident of Rome, who shows her the sights and puts her to bed. The doubts and raptures of adultery are very thoroughly investigated.

Well, that's something, anyway; and the author is entitled to claim it as a reason for reading his book. If it's good enough for Tolstoy, damn it, it's good enough for Fiedler!

Yet shouldn't we have some sympathy with the characters, although it is the fashion to accept in fiction heroes and heroines from whom in real life we would run a mile?

Indeed the fashion is as old as the novel itself and the picaresque rogue. But then the author must revel in the vitality of his creation. Professor Fiedler does not—except in the more outrageous of his hero's repartees.

He is presented to us as a lost, mannerless boor, bearable only by contrast to the delegates. As for his poor, pregnant woman, battered about by these intolerable males, she does not really live except in the sense that a toad beneath the harrow is remarkably active.

Neither of his protagonists is in any conceivable way lovable.

The story is rolled out flat by frequent and, one must admit, quite accurate descriptions of the calls of nature. The duties of puritanism again. Oh God, for Rabelais!

But a word of caution here. If Fiedler ever opens up his

formidable artillery of ridicule and invective upon an object more worthy than harmless tourists in Rome and the submerged tenth of the half-educated, take a look at it!

You might be missing a treat. (Heinemann, 30s.)

Now, here really is a love story—*Return to the Fairy Hill* by Naomi Mitchison; and I'll tumble over myself, with the enthusiasm of Mrs. Mitchison's own sentences, to imagine her reasons why we should read it. Because she is a woman with the brains of a Haldane, the spiritual insight of a Highlander and the passionate loyalty of a mother. Because she understands Bechuanaland and her beloved tribe. Because she longs to pass on the smell of the smoke and cattle in the evening, the touch of the arm of her adopted son and nominal Chief around her shoulders. To which we can only answer: one of them would do, dear Mma (Setswana for Ma and presumably pronounced much the same), but to be offered the lot is riches indeed.

It all started with a meeting of eyes at —of all places!—a British Council party.

"If I had been told that I would get into a position where, in common with 30,000 other people, I would love and honour this young man as my Chief, I would have said this was impossible for a European intellectual, even with a Highland background. This book shows just how it happened."

The young Linchwe, Chief of the Bakgatla, was obviously very much a man. What she saw in him I don't quite know. These Pauline conversions defy analysis. But what she makes me see in him are—put in my own crude terms—the qualities of a first-class company commander; courage and leadership taken for granted and, as well, loving care for the human beings in his charge, tenderness, a pride in justice. And I rather think that, given a month or two to get over the inferiority complex which South Africans and Rhodesians have forced upon him, he'd be just as good in command of whites.

But of course there is far more to it than that. Mrs. Mitchison well explains that numinous quality of a Chief. Politically, he is not much more than a JP and Chairman of the Rural District Council, unless he chooses to run for high office. But what he gives to his people is a sense of pride, security and identity. And anybody can join the tribe, as she did.

In return, she has given loyalty to the point of wishing to die, if it must be, with the regiments. Hysterical? Not for a moment. T. E. Lawrence said much the same. And there is a resemblance between his effort to influence Feisal without pressing too hard on him and hers to do the same for Linchwe. From time to time, her Chief certainly saw in her the managing matriarch and took refuge—in pub-crawling with the boys.

But neither ever forgot the triangular bond of love between the pair of them and the tribe. That firm and generous emotion is excitingly expressed in her poems, half Celtic, half African, at the end of her story.

The book is a fragrant and moving journal of how the Bakgatla live and think, but also a great woman's autobiographical sketch of herself, intensely feminine, efficient, driven to tears by frustration or emotion, then again absorbed by the long task of giving her tribe education, water, the techniques of dry farming and suggestions for a political system into which tribal values can be integrated.

I myself, am grateful for this book. I have never been entirely sure where I stood in this urgent matter of the African. *He is neither a symbol for emotional liberals nor a cypher for* Marxists, democrats and economists. I am told that it is my duty to like him—which is nonsense—but nobody ever gives me the evidence to judge whether I would or not.

Mrs. Mitchison has done it. At last I have a picture which I can fit into my own experience, though that was on another continent. This charming people, poor, naturally gay, with no sense of time but a superb feeling for essential values, are entitled to whatever you and I can give them. Technical aid of course they need, but above all, respect.

They have mine and will gain yours. (Heinemann, 35s.)

A Handful of Rice

A third love story—*A Handful of Rice* by Kamala Markandaya. Though in this, love, hope and vitality fade under the burden of nearly, but never quite, getting enough to eat. But do not let that put you off. Kamala Markandaya is a born story-teller, and that is his answer to our question of why we should read his novel. Because you will be as eager to know what happens next as in a thriller. Because every character is alive. Because he compliments us with a simple, flowing

English style which obeys him . . . Ravi leaves his village for the city, believing that there his elementary education must surely provide something better than the hungry life of a small farmer. He finds no work, sleeps on the pavement and realises that the only hope for him is petty crime.

Drunk, he breaks into the house of an old tailor. The daughter fascinates him, and so he replaces the window bars for nothing and makes friends with the family. The rebellious half of him is doomed. He marries his Nalini and becomes a tailor, taking his place in the crowded house of relatives.

Mr. Markandaya opens that house up for us. There is no privacy. There is no fun except for public festivals. A relative must not be thrown out even if he is bone idle and contributes nothing. The birth of a child—how they love children!—is both an emotional joy and a financial disaster.

After the death of the master tailor, the family drifts slowly to insecurity. Ravi is capable, but he cannot haggle as his father-in-law did, nor disguise his resentment of the English and Indian memsahibs who can hardly buy from him without insult. Debt and illness wear him down. One almost hopes that he will take to crime again.

He is ready for it, and appeals to a former friend and juvenile delinquent who is now rich from black-market operations. But when he learns that his friend has cornered rice and that the offered job is to hide and distribute the stores, Ravi will not take it. It is the mounting price of rice that has caused quarrel after quarrel with his once-loved wife.

After the death of his son—because they cannot afford a doctor—he returns in desperation to the black marketeer. I will not give away the pitiful irony of the ending.

(Hamish Hamilton, 25s.)

argosy bookshelf

A new novel by John O'Hara is always eagerly anticipated. He has been a leading literary figure for a generation or more and although he has on more than one occasion been slated by the critics, his position in modern letters is assured.

O'Hara's latest book, *The Lockwood Concern*, is a major work that spans four generations of an American family. It is a novel about the vanity of human wishes over a century of American social history.

The dominant characters are the Lockwood men—Moses, Abraham, George Bingham and George Bingham II. With each generation, the Lockwood men become more clever, more ruthless, more wealthy—and more successful with women. But something is missing in the Lockwoods and their Concern. (Hodder & Stoughton, 25s.)

The Genelte People, by Era Zistel, is a story about animals who are almost human. Few people could write about them with the warmth and humour of Era Zistel and she describes how a matriarchal goat and a racoon came to share her home in the Catskill Mountains and enjoyed it so much that they refused to go into the wilds again. (Arthur Barker, 21s.)

Irving Wallace's *The Sunday Gentleman* is a remarkable series of personal adventures. This lively fund of would-you-believe-it stories of improbable people and institutions have been fascinating the author for over twenty years. And they liberated the author who, anxious to get them into book form, gave up his job as a magazine feature-writer to become a seven-day-a-week Sunday gentleman. (Cassell, 36s.)

The Double Image, by Helen MacInnes, is about a young American, John Craig, in Paris. He encounters one of his old professors, once an inmate of Auschwitz, who is returning from testifying at the trial of Nazis in Frankfurt. The professor is in a state of shock for he has seen a "dead" Nazi walking along the streets of Paris. This is the beginning of a suspense tale of thrills and chills—and as always, Helen MacInnes uses acute insight into political events and espionage practices to shape events. (Collins, 21s.)

What do you do with a drunken civil servant after a party, when there's a hunchback in your pocket and a Japanese lily looking on? You will only find out in *Otley*, by Martin Waddell.

He is a young Irish-born author with a nice blend of the ridiculous and the wry when it comes to the misfortunes of life. (Hodder & Stoughton, 16s.)

Desmond Meiring's novel, *A Square Called Silence,* is set in Latin America during ten weeks of terrorism. In Caracas, the grand capital of an oil-rich country, the wealthy live in splendour while the crowded *ranchos* of the very poor hang

over the city. This contrast is the source of the city's brooding violence. Apart from this fascinating background, the author writes of a hero with a difference—a man who had a vision but chooses to lose it and live on. (Hodder & Stoughton, 21s.)

Argosy author William Scott's new novel, *Getting The Boy*, is an exciting plot of kidnapping and escape in the 1970s. A British Crown colony wants independence and as negotiations have broken down, they abduct the British Prime Minister's son from school and quickly smuggle him out of the country. The distraught British leader is faced with the problem of giving independence or having his son killed. (Elek, 21s.)

Couples in suburban bungalows are very far from being unusual these days. But Celia Dale gives them a delightful mixture of comedy and sadness in her novel, *A Helping Hand*. Quietly, with commonplace incidents, a tension builds up to a final crisis which is shocking in its irony. (Macmillan, 21s.)

Devotees of the Western usually agree that "Shane" is a classic of its kind—one of the best Western films ever made. The author of "Shane," Jack Schaefer, has now gathered together a collection of true tales of the goodies of the American West, under the title *Heroes Without Glory*. Schaefer feels that too much has been made of the bad men. Billy the Kid, for instance, who has been glamourised far beyond the often sordid truth. The result is stories of a gallery of personalities, rich in eccentric ways. Grizzly Adams, who had a fantastic urge to collect bears. Thompson, who made himself the first pair of skis in America so he could carry on a regular mail service over mountains. And Bear River Tom Smith who, almost single-handed, cleaned up Abilene.

(André Deutsch, 30s.)

The Man Who Loved Children is actually the sixth of the nine novels that Christina Stead has written. First published about twenty-five years ago, this fine book has been read and reread by people who were convinced it would, in time, be recognised as a classic. Now it is re-published with a brilliant introduction by the late Randall Jarrell who says, "If all mankind had been reared in orphan asylums for a thousand years, it could learn to have families again by reading this book."

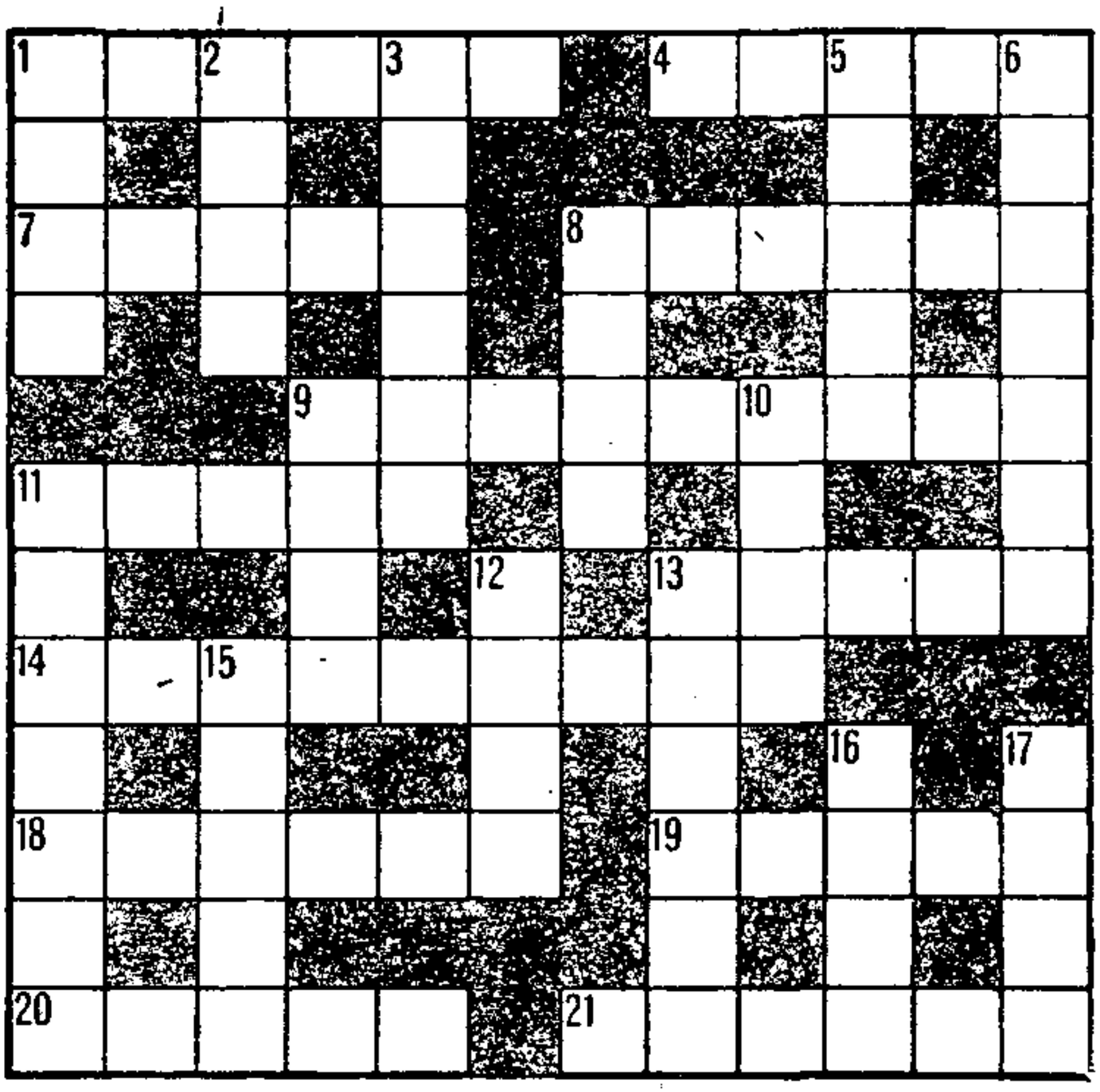
(Secker & Warburg, 35s.)

B.E.A.S.T. is a shortened version of Biological Evolutionary Animal Stimulation Test—according to the author, Charles Eric Maine. This is an involved title to an involved novel about the horrors of science. Mark Harland finds more than a breach of security at a secret biological research laboratory. B.E.A.S.T. actually becomes a beast and breaks loose from its magnetic tape.

And this is only the beginning . . .

(Hodder & Stoughton, 16s.)

TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD (Solution below)



ACROSS

1 Rich, fleshy and desirable ! (6).

4 Refuse (5).

7 Cold duck (5).

8 Sell all, tell all ? (6).

9 No cavalier (9).

11 American tropical fruit (5).

13 In the boat for dinner ? (5).

14 Adam and Eve create ! (5, 4).

18 Small seal ? (6).

19 First man of vision (5).

20 Not just now (5).

21 Workers hit back (6).

DOWN

1 This piper's got his colours ! (4).

2 Ruin (4).

3 Pith and this (6).

5 Vigilant—at the stern? (5).

6 Days of brine and dozes (7).

8 Makes a ham thick-skinned ! (4).

9 Disorderly scenes, usually (4).

10 Blow it ! (4).

11 A shade under the weather ? (7).

12 Hare's tail (4).

13 For those who were highly strung ! (6).

15 A mass of gold (5).

16 New Zealander (4).

17 Advance obliquely (4).

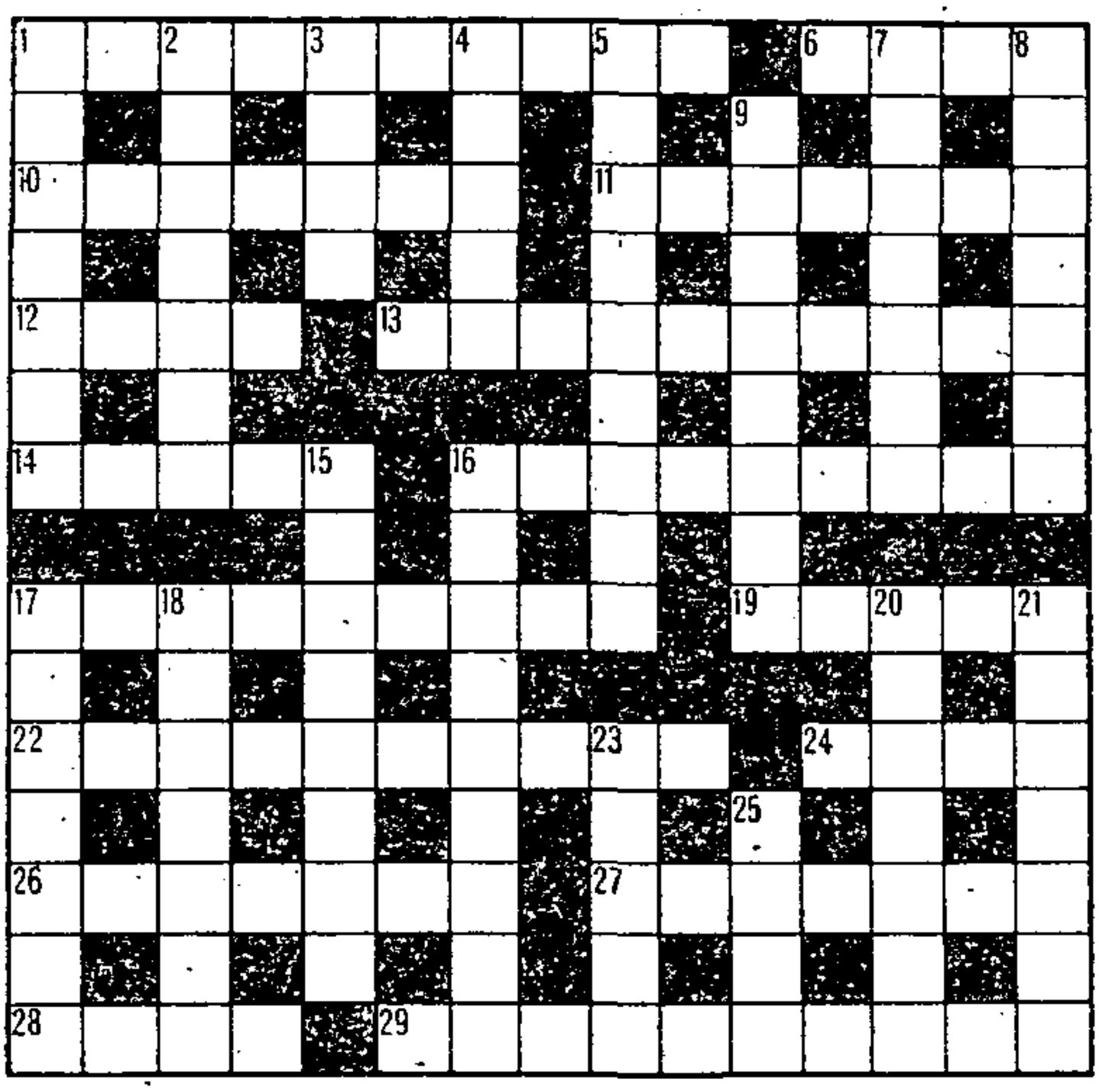
SOLUTION TO TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD

ACROSS. 1, Plummy. 4, Trash. 7, Eider. 8, Retail. 9, Roundhead. 11, Papaw. 13, Gravy. 14, Raise Cain. 18, Signet. 19, Baird. 20, Later. 21, Strike.

DOWN. 1, Pied. 2, Undo. 3, Marrow. 5, Awake. 6, Holiday. 8, Rind. 9, Rags. 10, Horn. 11, Parasol. 12, Scut. 13, Gibbet. 15, Ingot. 16, Kiwi. 17, Edge.

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 Tempestuous Shakespearian is thriving on us (10).

6 I repeat—see this bird! (4).

10 Young giant of the furnishing world (7).

11 Act incisively (7).

12 Some state to find a hut in! (4).

13 Nice pill in the antibiotic mould (10).

14 Their caps are worn in church! (5).

16 Sounds as though vessel's commander has unofficial audience (9).

17 Defence in depth? (9).

19 This wind's good for business (5).

22 Caucasianne! (5, 5).

24 Madame has style (4).

26 Kick upstairs! (7).

27 Hide on Mediterranean island to the end (7).

28 Oil plant, east of Suez (4).

29 Last one sent masses crazy! (10).

DOWN

1 You need pluck to take a chance! (3-4).

2 Farmyard festive fare? (7).

3 Sup up, there! (4).

4 Versify (5).

5 Dr. Crippen, for instance (9).

7 Frenchman helped people to see (7).

8 "Let us rather speak of —— days" (Churchill) (7).

9 Loitering, though there's no conviction! (8).

15 Causing a rift between characters (5-3).

16 The Borgias? (9).

17 They're sure to cut in on the deal! (7).

18 Paying for others' mistakes? (7).

20 This competitor has his teeth all right (7).

21 Confiscate the swindler, finally (7).

23 It falls between two stalls! (5).

25 Cold comforts? (4).

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